ASPECTS OF INDIAN RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

By

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To

SWĀMI NITYASWARUPANANDA

the sacrifice (*yajña*), the *mantra*, the divine body, the Puruṣottama, the divine Mother, but even in its attitude towards nature: and that justifies the inclusion of the article on nature.

Some of the essays presented here were not originally written as articles, they were the subjects on which the author spoke on different occasions at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta. These lectures were published from time to time in the *Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture*, and in that form, they have been included in this book The author owes much of his inspiration in this connection to the Secretary of the Institute, Swami Nityaswarupananda, who is a person of clear and definite ideas, great organizing ability, and uncompromising thoroughness. It is indeed a matter of great gratification that under his leadership the Institute has become a recognized seat of learning for the promotion of Indian culture; it is also one of the foremost centres of international cultural exchange in this country—a miniature UNESCO at work.

On the evolution of Mother-worship in India, the author first delivered a lecture at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture; that speech was later developed into a bigger article, which was published in the *Great Women of India*, a monumental volume issued to commemorate the first Birth Centenary of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, the illustrious consort of Sri Ramakrishna. The article on 'Some Later Yogic Schools' was contributed to *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Volume IV (Second edition), published by the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture. The three articles included under 'Studies in Vaisnavism' were contributed to some of the special numbers of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of Calcutta. Diacritical marks have been used in transcribing Sanskritic words and names; but well known proper names are given in their popular spelling.

Sri A. Mukherjee, the publisher of this book and a friend of the author, is a patron of learning also, besides being the Managing Director of a huge publishing house in Calcutta. Both the author and the publisher will feel amply rewarded if this book evokes in its readers even the slightest inclination to learn more about the various aspects of the lofty achievements of Indian religious thought.

Author

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THE INDIAN CONCEPTION OF SACRIFICE—ITS EVOLUTION IN AGES

To us, who have practically grown non-Vedic in our mental fabric as well as social behaviour, Vedic sacrifices mean nothing but the offering of something to the fire in accompaniment with the reciting and chanting of *mantras* invoking the gods who, when thus propitiated, would bestow on the *yajamāna* (the person who organizes the sacrifice and for whose benefit the sacrifice is made) health, wealth, and progeny here on earth and enjoyments and peace hereafter in heaven. Fire is said to be the mouth of the gods (*agnir mukhaṃ prathamo devatānām*), and so, offerings to the fire mean offerings to the gods.

In tracing the origin of this sacrificial religion, we are prone nowadays to ascribe it to the geographical and social contingency of the Vedic people. Some of us have supposed these Vedic Aryans to be the early inhabitants of some arctic region, where, because of the extremely cold climate, fire was the most important thing in the domestic as well as social life. Those who are not believers in the theory of the arctic home of the Vedic Aryans may, nevertheless, suggest that in the early Aryan society fire was a rare thing, very difficult to be produced and all the more difficult to be preserved for frequent use. It was of immense use, but it

was not easily accessible to the ordinary householder ; and this made it the most important thing in daily life. It has often been seen that what proves itself important in our domestic and social life rapidly acquires a religious value, and may be, by this process fire acquired a religious significance among the early Vedic Aryans. And thus all the activities associated with the kindling of the fire and preserving it for the domestic use of a particular individual as well as of the members of the society as a whole might have developed into the paraphernalia of a religious cult.

This historical approach, call it anthropological or sociological, need not detract anything from the religious value of sacrifice. To us it seems to be a vitiated perspective always to think of religion as a camouflage to hide the grossly biological and social needs of man. Historically speaking, we would call religion a welcome emergence through a process of sublimation—and the process of sublimation is never a process of camouflage; it is rather the fruition of the higher value-sense in man, which works in the individual and the social life of man as a dynamic urge and transforms the biological and psychological needs into the religious impulses. Historically that seems to have been the truth with regard to the origin and development of the early sacrificial religion of India. This question of sublimation suggests a deep significance of fire as the main accessary to a

religious performance. Fire is the element that has never a downward tendency, and its inherent upward tendency likens its workings to a process of sublimation. It has further to be observed that fire reduces the mass of everything that is put into it. Did this fact suggest to the Vedic people that, if they were to send their offerings to the gods who were higher and subtler beings, the offerings had to be reduced of their mass or, in other words, shorn of the grossness, before they could be expected to reach the gods? Was it the fact that the offerings were to be sent to the gods through the instrumentality of fire, because fire has the capacity of reducing the mass of things and giving them an upward motion?

A study of the Brāhmaṇa literature, which deals elaborately with the cult of sacrifice, its various types and the minutest details of the fastidious intricacies of its performance, is likely to leave the impression on our mind that in most of the cases sacrifices were performed with the aim of achieving some tangible gain either here on earth or hereafter in heaven; but there are ample indications in the Brāhmaṇas themselves that the sacrifices had other deeper functions to discharge —mainly in two directions, one in the direction of self-expansion and the other in the direction of self-purification. After this cult of fire sacrifice developed into a performance, involving elaborate paraphernalia, it no longer remained to be some-

thing done by one man for his own sake. Though the avowed aim of the sacrifice was some definite gain for the *yajamāna*, the performance itself developed into a team-work requiring the *hotṛ* to recite the *mantras* invoking the gods, the *adhvaryu* to make the actual oblations, the *udgātṛ* to sing, the *sāmans*, the *brahmā* to supervise, and a lot of other helpers to procure the specially required wood, to prepare the ground strictly according to the code, to make the fire and preserve it, and for other accessaries. This gave sacrifice the nature of a concerted action of many with one end in view. With different tasks assigned to each of them, they became organically related as parts of an integrated whole functioning distinctly but harmoniously and producing a unified effect.

This aspect of the sacrifice has to be specially marked, as it had subtler developments in later periods. The aim of this team-work was not also in all cases the fulfilment of the desires of a particular individual. The corporate life naturally placed before all a common aim—some benefit of the society at large and even to mankind. This act of making offerings to the gods and also doing something for the common good developed in the individual a sense that a man lives not exclusively for his own sake, but has a duty towards others also, be they gods or people of the society. This was self-transcendence and self-

expansion which marked a definite step in the advancement of the religious life of man.

The second point is that fire-sacrifice, whatever it originally might have been, soon acquired the character of a process of purification. A synonym for the word 'fire' is *pāvaka*, that which purifies. With this idea of purification, the idea of fire itself underwent a philosophic modification. Fire was not viewed merely as a physical element having the capacity of burning and producing heat. It came to be viewed as the divine lustre (*jyotiḥ*). A very famous *mantra* in the fire-sacrifice is *agnirjyotir jyotiragniḥ* (fire is lustre and lustre is fire).

It has been said in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (II.2.1.6): 'The sacrifice is born of fire, and fire, which is of the nature of divine lustre, burns all sin; this fire burns out the sins of the *yajamāna*, and he (the *yajamāna*) by his beauty, wealth, and fame becomes like a luminary here on earth, and because of the accumulation of merits, shines like a luminary also in heaven. It is for this that he performs the sacrifice.' The aim of sacrifice is clearly indicated here as the attainment of a luminous existence both here and hereafter. Again, it has been said in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (I.5.1. 1-3) that the gods conquered heaven by dint of performing sacrifices; after conquering heaven, they were thinking of a plan as to how to make it inaccessible to men; for the purpose, they sucked

the juice (the beneficial effects) of sacrifice as the bee sucks honey out of the flower and hid it (sacrifice) from the eyes of men. But the 'seers' among men could know of it; they began to perform sacrifices. In these sacrifices the 'seers' employed all their reverence and concentrated all their efforts, for they knew that the gods had attained the 'covetable' only through putting forth their reverence and efforts. May be that the ideal of the gods inspired these 'seers' to discover the means for attaining heaven; or, may be this urge for a higher life came from their own selves.

If we closely follow the cryptic stories and statements of the above type, quite frequently met with in the Brāhmaṇa literature, we must be struck by their suggestiveness. Heaven here suggests the ideal of a higher life, a luminous life of purity and bliss; and sacrifice was recognized and resorted to as the best method for attaining that ideal.

In the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (XXV.7) it has been said that Prajāpati, the original Creator, being desirous to be many, created the three worlds, earth, the intermediate region (*antarikṣa*), and heaven. He meditated on the three worlds and through His meditation three luminaries sprang out, fire on earth, air in the intermediate region, and the sun in heaven; from these three came forth the three worlds referred to in the *gāyatrī mantra*, viz. *bhūḥ*, *bhuvaḥ* and *svaḥ* ;

these three worlds represent the three syllables, *a*, *u*, and *ma*, the three parts of the Praṇava, *Om*, which is the sound-representative of the supreme One. The point to note is that fire was viewed as representing in the physical plane the same principle of which all the luminaries of the higher planes are representatives or manifestations. As such fire was viewed on earth, or, we may say, in the physical plane, as representing lustre of the supreme One. We find a direct echo of this spirit in the verses composed in later times to praise the sacrificial fire, where it is said:

akhila-bhuvana-garbhe vartase cit-svarūpo
vilasati vibhavas te sthūla-sūkṣme paraṃ yat,
anala-vapur iha tvam brahma pratyaksa-rūpam
sa khalu nivasa yajñe sādhu havyaṃ gṛhāṇa.

'As a thought-principle (*cit-svarūpa*) thou remainest in thy embryonic form in the womb of the cosmos, thy grandeur shines in the gross, subtle, and supreme forms; fire is thy body here on earth, the embodiment of Brahman; let thou remain in the sacrifice and accept suitable offerings.'

Coming to the period of the Āraṇyakas and the Upaniṣads, we find that the ceremonial character of the sacrifice was replaced by the meditative. We find a new and striking interpretation

of the well-known *aśvamedha* sacrifice (where the flesh of a horse forms the main offering) just at the beginning of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad.* There it is stated that the dawn is the head of the sacrificial horse, the sun is the eye, air its vital wind, fire its mouth, the complete year its entire body; heaven is its back, the intermediate region its belly, the earth its hoofs, the quarters its sides, the seasons its limbs, day and night its strides, the stars its bones, the rivers its nerves, and so on. This cosmic process of a complete year is then the horse, and this horse has to be sacrificed to the Brahma-fire, *i.e.*, the fight of the supreme One. What is the significance of this sacrifice? One is to meditate on the workings of the universe, on the cosmos rolling on and on in its temporal aspect. This meditation on the universal process will reveal before the mind of the seers the true nature of the universe, which moves and has its meaning in the light and delight of the supreme One. Sacrifice in this context then means an attempt at getting the meaning of the universe in the light of the Absolute; it is going from the effect to the cause and also sacrificing the effect to the cause.

Again, at places the cosmic process itself has been viewed as a process of sacrifice. Thus it is said in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*: 'The region above is the (sacrificial) fire, the sun the sacrificial wood, the rays of the sun are the smoke, the day is

the flame, the quarters are the heated charcoal, the minor quarters are the sparks; of this fire the gods make an offering of their reverence. . . .' Again, 'The rain-cloud is the fire, the course of the year its sacrificial wood, the smaller clouds its smoke, the lightning its flame, the thunder its burning charcoal, the roaring its sparks. . . .' We also find, 'The region below is the fire, the earth its sacrificial wood, fire is the smoke, the night the flame, the moon the burning charcoal, and the stars its sparks. . . .' (VI.2.9-11).

Exactly a similar description of the sacrifice that is going on in and through the cosmic process is found in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (II.5.5 ff.). Various other descriptions of the process of sacrifice in the working of nature abound in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*.

The philosophical implication is that, if we mark the workings of nature and ponder over them, we shall find that nature herself is constantly performing a sacrifice. On a scrutiny of the workings of nature, a few features must strike us. We find co-ordination among the various parts and elements—all having separate function to discharge, but working harmoniously to produce the desired effect. The lower principles are co-operating with one another and are again merging themselves in a higher principle, marking an advancement at every stage. This, then, is the first aspect of the sacrificial character of the work-

ings of nature. The second aspect relates to the aim of the workings of nature. The seers of the Upaniṣads believed that the workings of nature, in spite of all apparent irregularities and cruelties involved therein, were finally aimed at doing the best that could be done for the all round well-being of the creatures on earth. This aim at doing good to beings at large by increasing the progeny and nourishing them by supplying food and shelter marks the second aspect of the sacrifice being carried on by nature. The third aspect emphasizes that nature does not work for herself; she works for the satisfaction of a supreme luminous Truth, and all her workings are really offerings to that luminous Truth, inasmuch as they are expressions of an eternal dream of the Absolute. The Absolute transcends all. 'The sun does not shine there, nor do the moon and the stars, nor the lightning—what to speak of the physical fire! It is That which is shining, and all else shine after It; everything shines through the luminous self-expression of that supreme Truth' (*Kaṭha*, II.2.15; *Muṇḍaka*, II.2.10 ; *Śvetāśvatara*, VI.14).

The seers of the Upaniṣads discovered a process of sacrifice not only in the workings of nature, but even in the life-process of man. Just think of the human organism and the life-process consequent on its workings including all the biological, psychological, and even the spiritual phases. The minutest organ has a special function assigned to

it, but all of them are again interdependent and work in close co-operation, and the life-process moves on only as a result of the harmonious workings of all the organs including the senses and the mind. Just take the instance of the vital wind which is divided into five distinct types, viz. *prāṇa*, *apāna*, *samāna*, *vyāna*, and *udāna*, each having a special function to discharge. The keeping up of the vital force is consequent on the harmonious functioning of all the five.

The ancient seers also noticed that even in the biological process the lower principle works to the best of its capacity and offers the fruits of its workings to the next higher principle, and that in its turn to the next higher, and so on, until the offering goes from life to mind, then from mind to the individual soul, and from the individual soul finally to the supreme Soul. We find in the Upaniṣads that life-force (*prāṇa*) is a higher principle than matter (*anna*). So matter must make an offering of itself to life-force. Again, mind (*manas*) is a higher principle than life-force, and so life-force must make an offering of itself to mind. Further, mind must make an offering of itself to bliss (*ānanda*), and bliss to knowledge or the truth-consciousness (*vijñāna*). Finally, the truth-consciousness must make an offering of itself to the luminous supreme Truth. Again, it has been said that the senses of man represent a higher principle than the external objects. So the

external objects offer themselves to the senses; the senses carry the external stimuli received from the objects and make a new offering to the mind; the mind transmits them as an offering to the intellect, and the intellect to the supreme Truth.

What then is the significance of this process of sacrifice? Sacrifice means a gradual process of ascent from the lowest principle to the highest truth of divine bliss and light and also a return process of gradual descent from the highest to the lowest, transforming and transubstantiating the lowest through the flow of nectar and the effulgence of lustre from the highest Truth. It has been said in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (IV.16.1) that what purifies is sacrifice (*eṣa ha vai yajño yo'yaṃ pavate*). The general aim of sacrifice has often been said to be the attainment of the *devaloka*; but what is this *devaloka*? The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (III.1.8) says, it is the land of divine lustre (*dīpyata iva hi devalokaḥ*). What then is the significance of sacrifice? It is the attainment of a luminous divine existence through a continual and gradual process of purification. The *agni-vidyā* (the knowledge of fire) has therefore been identified in the Upaniṣads with the *ātma-vidyā* (the knowledge of the self), and that again with the *Brahma-vidyā* (the knowledge of Brahman). This Upaniṣadic idea of sacrifice is still dominating the religious attitude of the people of India who resort to sacri-

fice as a religious method. This will be apparent even from a cursory glance at the *mantras* that are recited in performing sacrifices. Before making oblations to the fire, one is to purify every part of one's body, mind, and soul, and at every step of this process of purification one must say: *jyotir ahaṃ virajā vipāpmā bhuyāsaṃ svāhā* (Let me be pure lustre bereft of all dust [affliction] and sin). In making offerings to the sacrificial fire one is to recite the *mantra:*

yatra brahmavido yānti dīkṣayā tapasā saha,
agnir mā tatra nayatu agnir medhā dadhātu me.

'Let fire lead me to the place where the knower of the Brahman goes with his initiation and penance. Let fire vouch-safe me mental vigour.'

Through a course of evolution for centuries, this Upaniṣadic doctrine of sacrifice developed itself into a philosophy of disinterested *karma* (action) guided by an unflickering God-consciousness, and that is the philosophy of sacrifice as we find it in the *Gītā*. The philosophy of sacrifice is introduced in the *Gītā* in a new context. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the teacher of the *Gītā*, was encouraging his disciple Arjuna to work, and at the same breath he was speaking highly of the path of knowledge for the attainment of the supreme good. The disciple naturally got bewildered as to the compatibility of the path of work and the path of knowledge (that leads to the path of renuncia-

tion). This principle of work and renunciation can be synthesized only by a change of perspective with regard to the principle of *karma*—and that new perspective can be attained only by introducing the philosophy of sacrifice in the sphere of *karma*.

Ordinarily, it is believed that *karma* binds man down to the plane of lower existence ; but that is true only when *karma* is narrowly self-centred, and whatever is narrowly self-centred is anti-religious. But *karma* never binds man down if it be resorted to with a spirit of *yajña* or sacrifice, *i.e.*, giving up of the self for the cause of the many and through that many ultimately to the cause of one supreme good. In advocating this principle of *karma*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa says that every one has to perform *karma*, whether he wants it or not; for the life-process cannot be kept a-going even for a moment without *karma*. When it is a fact that *karma* cannot be avoided even if we want to do so, the best thing is to accept *karma* from a higher perspective, the perspective of sacrifice—and that is not an imaginary perspective. It is, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa emphasizes, the only correct attitude towards *karma*.

The confusion here in the mind of Arjuna actually represents the condition that was created in the age of the *Gītā* by the sharply antagonistic attitude between the two schools of Mīmāṃsā philosophy, the Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā, lay-

ing exclusive stress on *karma*, and Uttara-Mīmāṃsā, laying exclusive stress on Jñāna. Śrī Kṛṣna steers clear of this and brings about a happy synthesis by putting a new meaning to the conception of sacrifice and emphasizing a particular aspect of it which he thinks to be the most essential. This aspect of sacrifice is disinterested *karma* with the ultimate ideal of a supreme good in view. It is said, 'When Prajāpati first created the beings, He did so with *yajña* or the principle of disinterested work. He said to the beings He created, "May you all progress gradually by this, and may it give you the desired thing. By the sacrifice may you think of the gods and the gods think of you, and by such reciprocity of offering and goodwill, may you all attain the highest good"' (*Gītā*, III.10-11).

The implication is that disinterested work with an ultimate ideal of the supreme good in view is the guarantee of the cosmic process itself. Had the stars and planets in the infinite space around been self-centred and acted regardless of others, there would have been constant clashes and conflicts, and everything would have been lost in a dismal chaos. Again, had the beings created by Prajāpati acted only in a selfish way without having any regard for others, there would have been no society, no institution, and no civilization, and even the individual could not thrive absolutely independent of others. So we

see, the world around and our life-process in it are held fast by an underlying principle of sacrifice, the principle of disinterested work for the common good and ultimately for the highest good. When this universal ideal of sacrifice is accepted, there will be no greater sin than to be selfish, and this has been emphasized by the assertion of Śrī Kṛṣṇa that a thief is he who eats alone, and 'sin he eats who cooks for himself' (*Gītā*, III. 12-13).

The other aspect of the sacrifice explained in the *Gītā* is the ideal of a progressive ascent by offering the lower principles of our life to the higher ones. In this the *Gītā* merely clarifies the Upaniṣadic doctrine explained before. Ordinary people perform sacrifice by offering the objects of sight and sound to the respective sense-organs; but others (of a higher calibre) sacrifice all the sense-activities to the fire of discipline and restraint. Again, people of a contemplative mood kindle the fire of arrest (of the activities of the mind) by self-restraint with the help of knowledge, and they sacrifice in that fire all the activities of the senses as also of the vital force. The *yogins* perform sacrifice first by offering *prāṇa* (the upward current of the vital force) to *apāna* (the downward current of the vital force) and then by offering *apāna* to *prāṇa*, and then, again, by arresting the course of both of them through the yogic process known as *prāṇāyāma* (*i.e.*, the

control of the vital force). Others, again, offer all the currents of vital force to the flow of the basic vital force (*Gītā*, IV. 26-30).

Thus the method and character of sacrifice differ according to the mental aptitude as also the calibre of the men who resort to it. But the ultimate aim in all these cases is to attain a higher principle through the giving up of the lower one, and the generalization in the *Gītā* is that all the *karmas* lead us to a great life, a life divine when all our *karmas* are purified by our offering them to the fire of divine knowledge. As for the ideal form of sacrifice, the *Gītā* says that it is to realize that ultimately the fire to which the offerings are made is nothing in essence but the supreme One; the offerings that are made are also in their ultimate nature nothing but the supreme One; the act of offering and the man who makes the offering are all Brahman in their ultimate nature; and the final destination that is to be reached through this *Brahma-karma* (*i.e.*, works which in their ultimate nature are nothing but the self-activities of the supreme One) is also the supreme One (*Gītā*, IV. 24).

In the Haṭha-yogic schools including the schools of Tāntric Yoga, we find interesting adaptations of the Vedic principle of sacrifice. By the Yoga schools in the present context we mean the schools which have accepted the body as the medium for realizing the highest truth. The idea of a particular type of sacrifice, *viz.* the *soma-*

sacrifice, influenced the practices of these Yogic schools. *Soma* was first extracted and distilled and then purified through the process of sacrifice, and afterwards this *soma*-juice was drunk by the sages with a view to attaining an immortal life, for *soma* is the *sudhā* or *amṛta* (nectar). It was believed that this immortalizing juice was derived by the *soma* plant from the moon; the *soma* plant was believed to grow sixteen leaves on the full moon night corresponding to the sixteen digits of the moon. The moon is called *Somapati*, the lord of *soma*, or *Oṣadhīśa*, the lord of plants ; the general belief is that the quintessence of the world is deposited in the moon in the form of *soma* or *sudhā*. The whole world is believed to be made of two fundamental principles, *agni*, fire, and *soma*, the immortalizing juice. Fire is the eternal consumer and *soma* the eternal consumed ; they are well known as the *annāda* and the *anna*. All sacrifices are fundamentally to deal with this principle of fire and *soma*.

According to the *yogins*, this body of man is an epitome of the external universe and, as such, contains within it all the truth that the external universe possesses. The principle of fire is represented in the body by the *vaiśvānara-agni*, which is there in the body to consume all food. Food is consumed and transformed into a liquid juice, which is further consumed and transformed into blood; blood into flesh, bone, and marrow; that

into semen; that again into *ojas*, vital energy; and that finally into *sudhā*, nectar, which becomes deposited in the moon that is believed to be situated in the highest cerebrum region of man. As in the Vedic *soma*-sacrifice the main thing is to have sufficient quantity of *soma*-juice properly pressed, so is the case with the yogic sacrifice, the first thing being the production of sufficient quantity of *sudhā* by the preservation of the vital energy through a strictly disciplined and regulated life. The secretive juice of the body has by nature a downward tendency, which must be totally changed and the internal flow of the vital energy must be given an upward tendency, so that it may be deposited in the moon of the highest region through a process of distillation. The next important part of the yogic sacrifice is to see that the *soma* or *sudhā* thus deposited in the moon may not be misused. It must be drunk in a particular yogic process, as a result of which the physical body will be transformed and transubstantiated first into an ethereal body and finally into an immortal divine body of light and bliss. Sri Aurobindo, the great *yogin* of the modern age, has further suggested that the *soma* or immortalizing nectar that trickles down from the moon situated in the head is but a phase of the highest *soma*, the flow of nectar that eternally trickles down on all spiritual, mental, and physical existence in the form of divine light and bliss.

In later times, when the sacrificial religion of the Vedas ceased to be a living religion with us and other faiths and religious methods cropped up, the idea of sacrifice underwent various transformations. As for instance, we may speak of the idea of sacrifice prevalent among the Bengal Vaiṣṇavas. It was prophesied in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, they say, that the Kali age is not the age for the sacrifice of the Vedic type; a new type of sacrifice will come into being, and that will be in the form of singing in praise of God, singing His name in a congregation (*yajñaiḥ saṅkīrtanaprāyair yajanti hi sumedhasah*). Śrī Caitanya, in the sixteenth century, came with his clarion call for this new type of *yajña*, the *nāma-yajña*, *i.e.*, (congregational singing of the name of the Lord. A large number of people came forward enthusiastically and accepted this new type of sacrifice in preference to the older Vedic type, which, they thought, was not at all suitable for the age.

Apart from the religious sphere, this idea of sacrifice is still exerting today a tremendous influence on the general cultural life of India. Any one familiar with the literature of Tagore will testify to the fact that the idea of sacrifice, with all its Vedic and Upaniṣadic implications, greatly influenced the ideology of the poet. According to Tagore, the performance of sacrifice has two cycles. In the first phase, the infinite Truth is sacrificing or casting off its 'oneness', and the

formless is manifesting itself in forms in 'ceaseless patterns'. The Absolute is performing this sacrifice for the fulfilment of its own desire, its desire for self-realization through self-manifestation. The other part of the sacrifice is being performed by its finite counterpart, which is striving strenuously to realize the meaning of its very being by making an offering of itself to the infinite One, by putting itself in tune with the Infinite. In this performance of the sacrifice, the Infinite and finite, God and man, have been eternally related in a bond of creative comradeship, each seeking the love and co-operation of the other.

THE ROLE OF MANTRA IN INDIAN RELIGION

The word *mantra* may be derived from the root *mantṛ*, which means to speak, to talk (in confidence), to advise or to take advice, to ponder over, to deliberate. In the Tāntric literature, the word has generally been associated with the combination of the roots *man* (to think) and *trai* (to liberate), suggesting thereby that *mantra* is that which liberates when properly meditated on. Instead of perplexing ourselves over the derivative meaning of the word, it will be better if we try to understand the meaning of the word in which it has been actually used in different periods in the evolution of Indian religious ideas, beginning with the Vedas down to the present time.

Vedic literature is generally divided into two parts, the *Mantras* and the Brāhmaṇas. The *Mantra* part comprises the hymns to the deities, and the Brāhmaṇa part, the description of the methods of the various types of sacrifices. The *Mantras* were generally chanted in the various stages of the actual performance of the sacrifices, and it was strongly believed that these *Mantras*, if properly pronounced with strictly enjoined accent, intonations and the movement of hands, have the capacity to satisfy the deity or deities concerned, thereby producing the desired effect. If we ana-

lyse this conception of *mantra* of the Vedic period, we shall find that it is a language vested with an inexplicable supernatural capacity ; its function does not end in expressing an ordinary meaning; the very sound-aspect of a word or a combination of words has the capacity to make the deities invoked active and yield happiness on earth and enjoyment in life hereafter. It has to be particularly noted that a *mantra* exerts its power not so much through expressing the meaning as we understand it in the ordinary sense, but it functions deeply through its sound-vibrations. It was for this reason that the Vedic priests were extremely fastidious with regard to the pronunciation of the *mantras;* slightest deviation either in articulation or accent or modulation was calculated not only to make them negatively fruitless, but positively harmful.

So far as the early Vedic period is concerned, the *mantras* had their *raison d'être* in the implicit faith of the people, call it primitive in derision, or unsophisticated in deep reverence. Then came Buddhism with its revolutionary ideas and agnostic scepticism. Though, we shall see presently, *mantras* played some role even in Buddhism in the various phases of its evolution, its strong opposition to, and stern criticism of, the sacrificial religion, enjoined in the Vedas, necessitated the putting forward of a rational basis for the belief in the efficacy of the *mantras*, for the superstruc-

ture of the Vedic sacrificial religion falls flat if the mysterious power inherent in the very nature of the *mantras* is not believed in. This task of rationalizing the belief in the secret power of the *mantras* was seriously taken up by the Mīmāṃsakas, who advanced the theory of *śabda* or word. The sound produced in pronouncing a word is not a purely accidental or ephemeral phenomenon; every *śabda* has got an eternal character as the sound-representative of an eternal principle. The *mantras* of the Vedas are not therefore words or combination of words made by any human agency. They are eternally there as so many representatives of eternal principles co-existent with the very cosmic process, and they are even to survive the cosmic process. It is for this reason that the sages are called the seers of the *mantras*, and not the makers of the *mantras*. Because of the purity and transparence of their whole being, various aspects of the eternal truth revealed themselves to these sages in the form of sound-representations, and these are the *mantras*. This will explain also the belief that the Vedas were not composed by human beings, for the Vedas, as the collection of the *mantras*, are not there to convey mundane meanings to us; they possess negative and positive injunctions which represent eternal principles which hold fast the whole cosmic process. Even when the cosmic process will cease to be, at the time of the great dissolution (*mahā-*

pralaya), the Vedas, as the collection of *mantras* or the body of eternal truths, will remain. This is suggested by the later tradition that God, incarnated as the Fish, saved the Vedas, when the whole cosmos was submerged in the destructive deluge.

One important point has to be clearly understood in connection with the *śabda* theory of the Mīmāṃsakas. The Mīmāṃsakas were believers in gods, but not in any God. Again, these deities or gods were believed to have no existence independent of the *mantras* relating to them. The *mantras* relating to these gods represent their essence, or we may say that the gods have their very being in the *mantras*. The gods have therefore no mysterious power other than the power which the *mantras* possess. Thus the *śabdas* of the Mīmāṃsakas, as sound-representatives of eternal truths, have nothing to do with a supreme Being as the ultimate source or support of all. The conception of Śabda Brahman, as the first cosmic vibration of the absolutely inactive and unqualified supreme Being, seems to have developed later on as a fusion of the ideas found in the Upaniṣads and the sound-theory of the Mīmāṃsā school.

In the Vedic and Brāhmaṇic literature, *vāc* (speech) has sometimes been depicted as the goddess created by Prajāpati (the primordial Creator) and again married by him. *Vāc* has been described

sometimes as the second to the primordial One. In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, *vāc* and *prāṇa* (life) have been spoken of as members of the first couple (*mithuna*) in the process of cosmogony. The *Ṛg-Veda* is spoken of as representing the quintessence of *vāc*. It is said in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* that the primordial One, desirous of creating the universe, produced the original pair by uniting mind (*manas*) with *vāc*. In this context, mind has been described as the father and *vāc* as the mother. Descriptions of this type may be philosophically interpreted in the following way. The creative process proceeds from the original One, first as the self-consciousness of the unqualified One; from self-consciousness proceeds determination and ideation on the one hand, and creative vibration, on the other, in the form of *vāc* or word. Ideation and creative vibration must unite as father and mother to give birth to the cosmos, their child. Though ideation and creative vibration are here spoken of as father and mother, they are not really two, they are one in two and two in one. As there cannot be creative vibration as the beginning of the cosmic process without there being any ideation, so there cannot also be purely abstract ideation without having its support in the creative vibration. This idea was widely accepted in Tantra literature in explaining the theory of *bindu* and *nāda*, or Śiva and Śakti.

As pointed out before, this Upaniṣadic idea of

the union of ideation and creative vibration seems to have got associated with the emphasis of the Mīmāṃsakas on the eternal nature of *śabda* and the whole thing resulted, in later times, in the conception of Śabda Brahman, as contrasted to Aśabda Brahman. Aśabda Brahman is the unqualified one, popularly conceived as containing in its pure existence the possibility of the whole cosmic process contracted into a nothingness; and Śabda Brahman is a self-conscious being with its active impulse, *śabda* being the first manifestation of that active impulse. The Upaniṣads themselves speak of the two aspects of Brahman, the unqualified and unmanifested and the qualified and manifested.

This conception of Śabda Brahman has aptly been compared to the Christian idea of the *logos*, translated as Word in English. When St. John says, 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God', we would interpret the Word as Śabda Brahman, which, as the union of ideation and creative vibration, was implied in the very nature of Brahman. As such, it may, to a certain extent, be said to be identical with Brahman, and that is hinted by the expression, 'the Word was with God and the Word was God'.

We are referring to this conception of Śabda Brahman because of the fact that some such idea seems to have exerted a deep influence on the

mind of the Indian people, from very old times, in moulding their belief in the unseen but unquestionable power of the *mantras*, as well as in propounding various theories about the nature and power of the *mantras*. This influence is felt not only in the vast field of the Tantras where the *mantra* element is palpably predominant, but it is felt even in the field of grammar where there are beliefs in, and speculations on, some sort of ontological basis for all the articulated words.

The position of the Indian grammarians in this respect may be summarized in the following way. The sound of a word is the outward manifestation of the word through the help of air and the vocal organ. This outwardly manifested form is called the *vaikharī* form of the word; it is preceded by a subtle form called the *madhyamā*, where the words are not articulated as aerial vibrations, but are articulated within as states and processes of intelligent mentation ready to be embodied in units of sound. This, again, is preceded by still subtler form called *paśyantī*, where the word and its meaning lie inseparable as a potency like the seed of a great tree before it sprouts. Behind this potential state is the state of an undivided great power called *parā*, which may be described as the receptacle of all word-potency. The meaning of a word is therefore neither accidental nor man-made; every word in its ultimate nature is but a unit of power, of the non-dual power that lies be-

hind the whole cosmic process. The meaning of a word is just the particular way in which a unit of the cosmic power works. The special power of the *mantra* may therefore be explained as the special way in which it is originally charged to behave by the great cosmic power. This *parā* state of the word may be likened to the state of Śabda Brahman referred to above. In the Tantras, this *parā vāc* has been taken to be the supreme Śakti, in whom the cosmos lies dormant like a seed, and through whose activities again the cosmos comes into being.

Along with these philosophical speculations on the nature of the *mantras*, we may briefly refer to some speculations made in the province of Buddhism. Some sort of a belief in the *mantra* element is found in Buddhism from a very early period, as is exemplified by the belief in the mystic power of *paritta* (protective formulas), as also of the *sacca-vacana* (speaking the truth). The Jains have also their belief in the protective *mantras* and the *maṅgala-sūtras* or the verses which have the capacity of rendering beneficial effects. We may refer here to the wide use of the *dhāraṇī*, which literally means that by which something is sustained or kept up, *i.e.*, the mystic syllables that have the capacity to keep up the religious life of a man. The *mantra* element played an important role in the later phase of Mahāyāna Buddhism, particularly in the Tāntric phase. The

philosophy of *mantra* in Tāntric Buddhism is more or less the same as it is in Tāntric Hinduism. But the great Buddhist philosopher, Vasubandhu, offers a Buddhistic interpretation of *mantra* in his *Bodhisattva-bhūmi*. In explaining how unmeaningful syllables like *iṭi miṭi kiti bhikṣaṃti padāni svāhā* can help an adept in realizing the ultimate immutable nature of the *dharmas* (entities), he says that, as a matter of fact, these syllables have no meaning whatsoever; the follower should realize through concentration on these syllables that the *mantras* can have no meaning at all; this unmeaningness is their real meaning. Through this absolute negation of all possible meanings to the *mantra*, the real meaning of the *mantra* as pure void is intuitively revealed to him. Thus this realization of the meaning of the *mantras*, as pure negation, helps a man to realize, in pure intuition, the nature of the *dharmas* as essenceless. But through this negation of all meanings to the *mantras*, a unique, transcendental, and immutable meaning is revealed to the heart of the *sādhaka;* this immutable nature is the real nature of all things.

So far as the practical religious life of the Indian people is concerned, the most important *mantra* that has been handed down from the Vedas to all generations to come is the well-known Gāyatrī *mantra*, which originally formed a part of a Ṛg-Vedic hymn and meant, 'We meditate

on that venerable divine lustre of the Lord who is the generator of all—the earth, the intermediate atmosphere, and the heaven ; may He direct our intelligence.' This Gāyatrī *mantra* had various developments in later times.

The first and the most important monosyllabic *mantra* is the sound *Om*, well-known as the Praṇava which is variously spoken of and explained in many of the Upaniṣads. It is generally taken to be the sound-symbol of the supreme One. The sound *Om* is said to be formed by the combination of three components, namely, *a*, *u*, and *ma*, each in its turn being the sound-symbol for a particular principle. The supreme Reality, as the universal soul-substance, has four states, namely, the states of awakening (*jāgrat*), of dream (*svapna*), of self-absorption, as if in sound sleep (*suṣupti*), and the fourth, the unqualified state that transcends all the categories (*turīya*). The fourth is the absolutely unmanifested state, where the Reality can be said neither to be existent nor to be non-existent. The third state of *suṣupti* may be described as the state where there is the first, but very dim awakening of the 'I-ness' resulting in a creative impulse. The second is a state of transition, where ideation is mixed up with an actual creative vibration. The first state is of clear self-consciousness resulting from concrete self-activity in the form of cosmic manifestation.

The *mantra Om* is a symbol for Brahman, as it represents, through its component parts, all the aforesaid states of the supreme Reality ; *a* represents the *jāgrat*, *u*, the *svapna*, and *ma*, the *suṣupti*. These three units of the *mantra* ultimately lead to the fourth state where it loses all its character as unit (*mātrā*) ; or, in other words, the *mantra Om* may be said to represent the whole truth of the Reality, from the unqualified, unmanifested state to the state of continual self-creation through cosmic manifestation.

In later times, the three components of the Praṇava have been explained as representatives of the gross (*sthūla*), the subtle (*sūkṣma*), and the causal (*kāraṇa*) principles ; and of creation, preservation, and destruction ; as also of the Hindu trinity Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva. They have also been associated with the six lotuses or the plexuses within the body, as expounded in the Tantras. This *Om* is the first and the most widely used of all the *bīja mantras*.

The Upaniṣadic phase of Indian religion was followed by a new development of the various systems of worship of the gods and goddesses, many of whom, if not the majority, were non-Vedic. By this time, the indigenous systems seem to have created a place for themselves in the warp and woof of the composite structure of Hindu religion and culture. In fact, the indigenous ele-

ments seem to have much to do with this new phase of our religious history.

Mantra was the most important element in all kinds of worship, as it was in all kinds of sacrifice. Only a few of the *mantras*, used in these worships, are Vedic, the rest being derived from a host of new type of religious literature that began to crop up in the form of the Purāṇas, Āgamas, and various kinds of Saṃhitās. These *mantras* are generally of the nature of invocations, praises, meditations, and salutations. These are, again, interspersed with monosyllabic *mantras*, which generally serve as the *bīja mantras* of the various deities.

Before we pass on to the Tantra school, where the *mantra* element has the fullest play, we would like to add a few words as to how the *mantra* element was introduced in different systems of Yoga, particularly the Pātañjala system and the Haṭha-yoga. Patañjali did not lay much stress on *mantra* in his system. His primary concern was the attainment of *samādhi*, the final arrest of all the mental states and processes. He admitted that *samādhi* is possible through the help of *mantras*, but he did not emphasize their inherent power in producing the final state of *samādhi*. To him. the muttering (*japa*) of a *mantra* meant the meditation on its significance ; this meditation on the significance of a *mantra* brings about one-pointedness (*ekāgratā*) of the mind,

which helps in the attainment of *samādhi.* Praṇava, for instance, is taken by him to be expressive of Īśvara ; meditation on the significance of Praṇava variously helps a man in the attainment of final *samādhi. Mantra* is to be resorted to in yoga practice only in so far as it renders a considerable psychological assistance.

The *mantra* element is not very much emphasized in the yogic sects resorting to *Haṭha-yoga.* The *sādhakas* of these sects are, of course, initiated with a *mantra*, but they too use the *mantras* more or less as auxiliaries to their various yogic practices. The primary concern of these *yogins* is the attainment of the perfection of the body, for they believe that the perfection of the body leads to a divinization of the body, which is a state of immutable divine existence.

It will be interesting to note here that in the Haṭha-yogic and Tāntric schools, we frequently find reference to the sound of an unobstructed cosmic rhythm (*anāhata-dhvani*), which a religious adept hears when his senses are purified, withdrawn from the worldly objects, and turned inwards. The religious adepts of the mediæval devotional schools also made much use of this *anāhata-dhvani.* This idea of the *anāhata-dhvani* is obviously based on the belief that the cosmic process proceeds from the original sound-rhythm, the Śabda Brahman; the rhythm becomes obstructed in the complicated structure brought

about by the creative evolution. The more one can withdraw one's senses from the tumultuous whirl of this process, the more one qualifies oneself to be in tune with the cosmic music; the more one is in tune with the cosmic music, the nearer one comes to the supreme Reality, from which proceed all vibrations of the cosmic music.

As already stated, the *mantra* element has its most diversified play in the Tantras. So far as the philosophy of *mantra* is concerned, the Tantras have nothing new to offer; they merely assimilated the extant ideas, modified them in the light of their Śiva-Śakti theology, and employed them to practical religious endeavour. Without entering into any theological detail, it may be said that Śiva stands for Aśabda Brahman explained before and Śakti for Śabda Brahman. The most popular terms to denote these two aspects of Śiva and Śakti are *bindu* and *nāda*, respectively. *Bindu* is a point which has existence, but no magnitude; all magnitude proceeds from the power (*śakti*) of *bindu*, which, because of its original nature as creative vibration, is called *nāda*. All *mantras* are modes and modifications of this *nāda*. To a real *sādhaka*, all sounds are *mantras*, as they, in various degrees, exemplify the infinite activities of the original Śakti, the great Mother. This is exactly what Rāmaprasāda, a devotee of Mother Kālī, tried to convey when he said, 'Whatever you hear through your ears are all really *mantras* of

the Mother, for Mother Kālī is of the form of the fifty letters; She bears a name in every one of them'.

All the sounds are made up of the fifty letters (*varṇa*) of the alphabet (Sanskrit alphabet, including the vowels and the consonants), and all the sounds are modes and modifications of the one power of the Mother. These letters are therefore called the *mātrkās* (diminutive forms of *mātṛ*, mother). A common practice in Tāntric worship is to make *mantras* out of each one of the letters and associate them with different parts of the body; the idea behind it is to feel that the different parts of our body are but the objectification of the different aspects of the great Mother, *i.e.*, the whole body, with all its biological and psychological processes, is but an instrument in and through which the divine power is having its display. This actually is a process of self-surrender, surrender both of body and mind.

The other important type of *mantra* in the Tantras, as also in other religious sects of Hinduism, is the *bīja mantra*, or the *mantra* as a seed. These mantras are generally monosyllabic sounds like *hrīṃ*, *klīṃ*, *śrīṃ*, *aiṃ*, etc. Every god or goddess has got a *bīja mantra*, and it is believed that the god or goddess manifests himself or herself through the proper muttering of the *bīja mantra*. The *bīja* may be said to be the microcosmic sound-representation of the ultimate

essence of a god or goddess. Every god or goddess emanates from, or is the incarnation of, the supreme Reality; the divergences are there only in response to the different tastes, temperaments, and aptitudes of the *sādhakas*. The *bīja mantra* has the capacity to represent the essential nature of a god or goddess even in its form as the smallest sound-unit.

Another type of *mantra* that is frequently found in the Tantras is the series of monosyllabic, disyllabic, and trisyllabic words which have apparently no meaning either separately or in combination. This sort of *mantras* is found exclusively in the Tantra literature, particularly in connection with the worship of the gods and goddesses. These *mantras* are widely used also in magic, sorcery, and therapy. There is the custom of writing the *bīja mantras* and unmeaning series of *mantras* of this type either on palm leaves or on earthen pots and keeping them at the door of the house, as a measure of safeguard against the various types of ghosts and evil spirits, as also all sorts of diseases. There is also the custom of writing the *mantras* on paper or birch-bark and wearing them on any part of the body, as a safeguard against the evil effect of the stars and planets, or against the evil spirits and the fatal diseases.

It is not difficult to explain the significance of this apparently unmeaning series of words as

mantras in the light of the *mātṛkā* theory of the Tantras. But may we humbly suggest, from the purely historical point of view, that some of these unmeaning *mantras* may as well be the relics of some obsolete dialects of the Mongolian group of speech, prevalent at some time in some part or parts of Mahācīna where, according to the evidence of our Tāntric literature itself, some form of Tāntricism was the popular religion?

Now we shall turn to a most popular religious practice of *japa* of a *mantra*, that is held important in almost all the religious sects of India. *Japa* is uttering a *mantra* repeatedly for a long time either inwardly or with sound-articulation. This practice of *japa* is generally associated with the ingoing (*pūraka*) and outgoing (*recaka*) of the vital air. Apart from the fact that breath-control has always been an indispensable accessory of all *sādhanā*, there is the belief that the process of ingoing and outgoing of the vital air is an epitome of the cosmic process of creation and dissolution, the coming of the created universe from the supreme One and again returning to It. By associating the *japa* of a *mantra* with the process of the vital air, the *sādhaka* always tries to be aware of this fundamental truth.

There is one kind of *japa* which is believed to be carried on continuously within us by Nature herself with the ingoing and outgoing of the vital air. It is called *ajapā-japa*, because of the fact

that it is being carried on independent of any human agency. A *mantra* is being always repeated with the breathing process, and it is called the *haṃsa mantra*, which may be interpreted as the causal sound of the vital function manifested as breathing. Figuratively, it is said that this *haṃsa* (swan) is playing in the waters of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā, which represent the two streams of the ingoing and outgoing of the vital air. The idea of *paramahaṃsa* (the great swan) comes from here; *paramahaṃsa* is one who has stopped playing in the streams of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā, and takes the course of a middle stream, called the Sarasvatī, and proceeds upwards to a lake of infinite and immutable joy. The *haṃsa mantra* has also been explained as being the combination of the sound *aham*, which stands for the Jīva, and *saḥ*, which stands for Brahman. It is said that the ingoing of the vital air naturally produces the sound *aham*, while the outgoing breath produces the sound *saḥ*. *Ajapā-japa* practically means to mark the current that is going on inwardly and to keep oneself in tune with it.

Another important *mantra* for *japa* is the Gāyatrī *mantra* to which we have referred earlier. If we analyse the Vedic Gāyatrī *mantra*, we may mark some significant parts in it; first there is the *bīja mantra* (*Om* in this case); the second portion refers to the knowing of the nature of the truth;

the third portion refers to the meditation on the truth; and the last portion refers to the attempt at making the truth active in every sphere of our practical life. The *bīja* marks the first step of the truth-consciousness ; the second step makes a gradual ascent to the truth; the third step marks the full realization of the truth; and the fourth step is an attempt at making the truth permeate every layer of our being with its light and bliss. Later on, we find many Gāyatrī *mantras* in analogy with the original pattern, each associated with a particular god or goddess selected as the *iṣṭa* (the ideal deity) by individual *sādhakas*. Every one of these contains first a *bīja mantra*, then the step of knowing the respective deity (*vidmahe*), then the meditation (*dhīmahi*), and then the last step of soliciting practical guidance (*pracodayāt*).

Yet another notable system of *japa* is the *nāma-japa* or repeating the name of the deity. It may be remembered that the *nāma* is invariably accompanied by a *bīja*, for there cannot be any *mantra* without a *bīja*. Some hold that *nāma-japa* must be done along with *artha-bhāvanā*, pondering over the meaning of the name. Thus, when one repeats *Rāma*, one must think and feel that the supreme Being is constantly sporting inwardly with one's whole being; in repeating *Kṛṣṇa* one must feel that the supreme Being is constantly attracting one's whole being towards Him, and so on. Others, on the other hand, are of opinion

that *nāma* has nothing to do with the accepted meaning of the words. *Nāma* is a sound-symbol discovered by advanced *sādhakas*, and is pregnant with all the potentialities of the supreme Being. *Nāma*, when repeated, will produce immense effect whether or not done with *artha-bhāvanā*, for they believe that the *nāma* and the *nāmin* (the possessor of the name) are identical.

We may conclude the subject under discussion by quoting a significant verse from the *Śvetāśva tara Upaniṣad* (IV. 1) which runs as follows:

ya eko'varṇo bahudhā śakti-yogād-
varṇānanekān nihitārtho dadhāti,
vicaiti cānte viśvam ādau sa devaḥ,
sa no buddhyā śubhayā saṃyunaktu.

Here the word *varṇa* may be explained as colour indicating the variety of the created universe , or it may be explained as referring to the variety of the patterns of beings. In the present context, however, the word may be taken to mean 'letter' of the alphabet, or the sound vibration. The supreme Being (*devaḥ*) was originally one and, without the creative impulse, manifested first in the sound-vibration (*avarṇah*), though of course, all the possibilities lay dormant in Him (*nihitārthaḥ*) ; with the help of His many kinds of power, He created the sound-vibration (*varnān anekān*), which marked the beginning of the cosmic process ; at the end, the whole cosmic process once more enters into Him.

EVOLUTION OF MOTHER WORSHIP IN INDIA

1. The Place and Origin of Mother Worship in India

Mother worship in India presents a very important but intricate aspect of the history of Indian thought as expressed in her philosophy, religion, general art and literature. A close scrutiny of the course of evolution of this Mother worship in India will show a wonderful assimilation of widely heterogeneous elements, which seem to have combined in later ages to give rise to a body of cognate legends and traditions and a similar trend of theological, if not philosophical, argumentation. Mother worship in India had a chequered history, deriving or developing new colour and tone in the course of its passage through the Purāṇic ages , new ideas of the Mother associated with new forms of worship developed and established themselves against the older background. Amidst all the diversities of notions and beliefs, the unity of the religious purpose aimed at by the real worshippers of the Mother—the *sādhakas* (spiritual aspirants)—was maintained.

Belief in some form or other in the mother goddess is to be found in the good old days of many of the races, Semitic, Hellenic, Teutonic and

Nordic alike. But what singles India out in this matter is the continued history of the cult from the hoary past down to the modern times, and the way in which the religious consciousness, developing and deepening round this Mother concept, has influenced the thoughts and ideas of the whole nation through the ages.

Whether based on our primitive emotions of wonder and awe, or on our crude or refined value-sense, the element of anthropomorphism has, according to the anthropologists, to be recognized as a motive force behind all religious phenomena. Mother worship with ceremonies and ritualistic practices, according to them, developed as a religious function under a particular social environment based on a predominantly matriarchal social system, where the mother was the central figure or the nucleus of the social structure. Two factors were mainly responsible for this important position of the mother in the primitive society. first, the economic role of women, and second, the absence of any rigid law or system of marriage, leaving a wide field for promiscuity. Children, as social entities, had their social description or status mainly with reference to the mother, and inheritance was also in the line of the mother. This dominant position of the mother in society made her a symbol, as it were, of power, social and economic. It may therefore be presumed that when men of these matriarchal

societies, inspired by their primitive emotion of wonder and awe, began to conceive of any higher supernatural being, they conceived it in the image of the mother.

Coming to the question of the evolution of Mother worship in India, it has been pointed out by a school of anthropologists and sociologists that the whole cult with all its heterogeneous and theological fabrications may be regarded as a contribution to the complex texture of the Hindu religion and culture mainly, if not solely, by the pre-Aryans, or the non-Aryan aborigines. They hold that the major portion of what is known today as the Śakti cult or the Mother cult of India developed when the social, cultural and religious admixture among the Aryans and the aboriginal non-Aryans was almost complete through a long process involving contact, conflict and compromise. The Vedic religion, they would contend, is characterized by a predominance of the male gods, where mother goddesses may be said to be almost conspicuous by their absence or unimportance. This, they hold, is mainly due to the then prevailing patriarchal system in the Indo-Aryan society. Some again have held that traces of the mother goddess as a consort of the father god (Śiva) are found in the Indus Civilization, by which is meant the probable pre-Aryan civilization hypothetically constructed on the finds of Mohenjo-daro and Harappā. Accepting

this working hypothesis that there existed at least in some parts of India a rich pre-Aryan civilization, it has been suggested that the nucleus of the mother goddess is to be found in female figurines, some supposed to be images of the Earth-goddess, and some the protoform of the later direful goddess—Mother Kālī. About the supposed Earth-goddess it has been said, "Now, it is well known that female statuettes akin to those from the Indus Valley and Balūchisthān have been found in large numbers and over a wide range of countries between Persia and the Ægean, notably in Elam, Mesopotamia, Transcaspia, Asia Minor, Syria and Palestine, Cyprus, Crete, the Cyclades, the Balkans and Egypt."[1] The obvious suggestion is that this probable mother goddess of the Indus Valley presents no isolated history of Mother worship, but indicates the existence of a widespread religious belief.

It will, in our opinion, be hazardous under the existing condition of our knowledge to assign to that hypothetical non-Aryan civilization the origin of the Mother cult of the Indo-Aryans. There is no gainsaying the fact that the matriarchal structure of society had a great deal to do with the development of the religious consciousness and practices gathering round the Mother cult. Nobody will, we think, be so orthodox as

1 *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization*, edited by Sir John Marshall, Vol. 1, p. 50.

to refuse to recognize the contribution of the aboriginal and other pre-Aryan races in the development of the Mother cult of the Hindu religion. We must not be led to hold superstitiously that the word non-Aryan or indigenous is almost synonymous with the word savage or barbaric. We should also carefully note that whatever is non-Vedic is not necessarily non-Aryan, and that the Vedas may not represent the whole of the old Aryan culture.

2. Prominent Mother Goddesses in the Vedic Literature

To trace the evolution of Mother worship in India we shall begin with the Vedas, since they are the earliest written records of the religion, literature and civilization of India. The Vedas, as we have hinted before, are dominated by the male deities, and the female deities who make their appearance are often given but a secondary place.

(I) ADITI

As one who had a great possibility of becoming a mother goddess of the Vedic period, mention may first be made of the goddess Aditi. She is often, if not always, described as the mother of the gods *(deva-mātā)*. She is not only the mother of the gods; she is at times described as the Mother of the universe. This tradition of Aditi

being the mother of the gods is found continued even in the Purānas ; but in the religious history of India, Aditi could not at any period establish herself as a popular mother goddess.

(II) PṚTHIVĪ

From the point of view of the evolution of Mother worship, the most important goddess seems to be the Earth-goddess, who has been invoked as the 'Great Mother'. It has to be noted that when Mother Earth is invoked or entreated, she is seldom praised alone, but is almost inseparably related with Father Heaven (Dyaus); yet it has to be admitted that the greatness and grandeur of Mother Earth commanded reverential praises from her sons, with whom the offering of songs was the real worship. "Great is our Mother Earth" (*Ṛg-Veda*, 1. 168. 33) was the exclamation of the Vedic poets. Father Heaven and Mother Earth were invoked to bestow on men a luxuriant growth of crops, food and riches; they were invoked to redeem them from all great sins and also to vouchsafe prosperity, happiness, valour, progeny and longevity. They were entreated to protect the people in war, and it was added "Let not Mother Earth get angry with us at any time." All motherly feeling, tender affection, generosity of heart and forbearance were attributed to Mother Earth, of whom the poets were proud to be the children, and the vastness, variety, resourceful-

ness and fertility of Mother Earth find innumerable patterns of expression. We find a further development of this idea of Mother Earth in the hymn to the Earth of the *Atharva-Veda* (12.1.1-18), where it is said, "Truth and greatness, the right and the formidable, consecration, penance, Brahman (Supreme) and sacrifice sustain the Earth; . . . she (the Earth) bears the herbs of various potency—let the Earth be spread out for us, be prosperous for us. On her are the ocean, the rivers—the waters; on her all food and plough-fields ; on her flourish those that breathe and stir ; . . . . let that Earth grant us all prosperity. The immortal heart of this Earth, covered with truth, is in the highest firmament—let that Earth assign to us brilliancy, strength, in highest royalty. On her the circulating waters flow the same, night and day, without failure—let that Earth yield us milk; then let her sprinkle us with splendour . . . Earth is Mother, I am Earth's son. . . . Thou hast become great, a great station, great is thy trembling, stirring, quaking; great Indra defends thee unremittingly. Do thou, O Earth, make us shine forth as in the aspect of gold; let no one soever hate us."[1] In this tone of intimacy and reverence had the sages bowed down to Mother Earth and paid her homage.

1 The hymn is given in portions. The English rendering of W. D. Whitney has been followed with alterations here and there.

The idea of the Sky-Father and the Earth-Mother may, however, be said to be a common feature of all the ancient religions. Fertilizing of the Earth-Mother by the Sky-Father through the rains is a common belief acquiring a religious significance almost from the dawn of human civilization.

Attention has further been drawn to the fact that the belief in and worship of this Mother Earth may be taken as a dominant feature of the religions of most of the aboriginal tribes of India. But having regard to the fact that this belief in Mother Earth, even as an article of faith, was almost a common belief with the ancient people, there is no necessity for affiliating the Vedic conception of Mother Earth to a similar conception in Indus Civilization, or the post-Vedic development of the idea in Indian religions to the similar belief in the aboriginal tribes.

So far as the Vedic pantheon is concerned, Mother Earth had, indeed, but a minor place in it; but in spite of this, she deserves our attention because in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Sītā the most exquisite and at the same time the most suggestive symbol for agriculture, is depicted as the daughter of Mother Earth and coming to man directly from her when man was furrowing the field. In some of the finest poems of Tagore on Mother Earth the same Indian mind manifests itself.

In the *Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa* (8. 5) the earth is

identified with Śrī; in some of the later Upaniṣads also the earth has been identified with the goddess Śrī or Lakṣmī, the goddess of harvest and fortune. As the goddess Śrī, the earth has been eulogized as the sovereign goddess and homage has been paid to her. In the Purāṇic literature the earth has frequently and variously been described as an aspect of the Śakti or the Great Mother. The earth is also described as a power or Śakti associated with Viṣṇu (cf. Bhūdevī), and in the sculptural representations of Lord Viṣṇu of the Gupta period and a few centuries following it, the goddesses who are found associated with Lord Viṣṇu on his either side are Śrī and Bhū, or sometimes Śrī, Bhū and Nīlā. In these representations of later times Viṣṇu seems to retain something of the old Vedic Sun-god, and Śrī and Bhū may stand for two aspects of the Earth-goddess, the aspects of prosperity and productivity.

In spite of the myths and legends that shroud the origin of Durgā in the Purāṇas, and in spite of the philosophic grandeur she acquired, the paraphernalia of her worship that are prevalent in India—and particularly in Bengal—betray an amalgam of the Purāṇic goddess with the Earth-goddess. To be brief, we may incidentally mention a few striking features. The first is that the annual worship of the mother goddess in her various aspects begins in autumn, which marks

the beginning of the harvest season in Bengal. To the common run of people in Bengal, the goddess Durgā is popularly known as the autumnal goddess. In the autumnal worship of the goddess her first representative is the branch of a *bilva* (*Aegle Marmelos*) tree in which the goddess is to be first awakened. In the next stage the representative of the goddess is the Navapatrikā or something like a female figure made with a plantain tree and eight other plants and herbs. In the worship of this Navapatrikā hymns are uttered in praise of all the plants and herbs separately, identifying the mother goddess with each of these plants and herbs. Mother has often been identified in her worship with rice (*dhānya-rūpā*), the staple food of a substantial portion of the Indian sub-continent. An epithet of Durgā is Śākambharī, which means 'the herb-nourishing goddess'. She is worshipped also as Annapūrṇā or Annadā, which means the goddess of food. During the spring she is worshipped as the spring goddess (Vāsantī Devī). In the autumnal worship of the goddess in the form of Lakṣmī, the goddess of harvest and fortune, the aforesaid Navapatrikā is taken in some parts of Bengal as the best representative of the goddess and, as a matter of fact, is worshipped as the goddess. All these will go to prove how the Mother, in later times, was identified with the harvest goddess and the goddess of fertility, who

again is nothing but a particular aspect of Mother Earth.

Another important fact already noted by prominent scholars is that the Mother Durgā or Caṇḍī of the Purāṇic Age has often been styled as Bhrāmarī or Bhramarī, *i.e.*, the female bee ; this also seems to be due to an unconscious identification of the goddess Durgā with the Mother Earth. In the Vedas, Mother Earth has variously been associated with honey; she yields honey, she discharges honey, overflows with honey, she is honey herself. Being thus the depository of all sorts of honey (water, milk, juice, etc.) she was conceived as the bee. As a matter of fact, "the Earth appears in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* as identical with *saraghā*, and *saraghā* is the bee according to the *Amara-kosha*."[1]

It is customary in some parts of Bengal to worship on the last day of the month of Pauṣa (*i.e.*, mid-January) the presiding deity of one's ancestral abode and of corn fields ; though the deity in the Brāhmaṇical version is a male deity, she is a female deity with many of the village people. It may be noted that at the end of summer and the beginning of the rainy season a religious vow (*Ambuvācī*) is observed (specially by Hindu widows), when cooked food is strictly prohibited so as not to hurt or disturb Mother Earth, who is

1 S. K. Dikshit, *The Mother Goddess.*

believed to be then in her periods. Probably, after summer, the first rain makes Mother Earth ready for conceiving the next crop, which fact has been religiously construed as above.[1] Villages in many parts of India abound with local village deities, popularly known as Grāma-devatās, who are most frequently female deities. It has been suggested that probably many of these represent some form of Mother Earth originally worshipped by the non-Aryan aborigines. Thus the worship of Mother Earth in India has a continuous history from the Vedic times.

(III) SARASVATĪ

Of the other Vedic goddesses, particular mention may be made of the goddess Sarasvatī, who is one of the most important goddesses of India still worshipped on a wide scale. Originally she was an important and sacred river in the *Ṛg-Vedic* Age, and then she became a river-goddess. The cool, transparent and tasteful water of the rivers was frequently compared to the milk of the affectionate mother, which nourishes men as their best drink, both being signified by the same word *payas*. This tendency of holding the rivers as mothers, coupled with the tendency to deify

1 Originally, however, the rivers became red with *gairika* (red-yellowish) particles carried from hills, and the red flow of the rivers was conceived as the menstrual flow of the Mother Earth. In Bengal the 7th Āṣādha (about the 21st June) is the fixed date for the starting of the Ambuvācī.

them, seems to have been responsible for the origin and development of the worship of the river-goddesses of India. The river Gaṅgā (Ganges) is ceremoniously worshipped as a mother goddess, and in some parts of Bengal her worship forms an essential part of the religious ceremonies that accompany the matrimonial function in an orthodox Hindu family. A series of legends in the Purāṇic Age has made the Gaṅgā a full-fledged mother goddess, associated in one way or another with the Trinity—Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, and it is sincerely believed by a large section of the Hindus even today that one will attain eternal peace if one can pass the last few hours of one's life half-immersed in the waters of the Gaṅgā. We may note here the other Hindu custom of consigning the ashes of the cremated body to the holy water of the Gaṅgā. The river Yamunā (Jumna) is mythically associated with the Sun-god as his daughter, but her prestige as a goddess seems to rest more on her association with the heavenly cowherd Kṛṣṇa, who had his love-dalliances with the cowherdesses of Vṛndāvana on the bank of the Yamunā.

The historical development of the river Sarasvatī took a different course. The hymns in praise of the river Sarasvatī in the *Ṛg-Veda* and the homage paid to her often induce one to believe that Sarasvatī was not always regarded as a mere river; there was a latent belief in a presiding deity

over the river. In one verse of the *Ṛg-Veda*, Sarasvatī has been praised as the best among the mothers, best among the rivers and best also among the goddesses, and as such she had a share in the oblations offered in the sacrifices. In the next phase of her evolution we find her identified with *vāc* or word, and that became the turning point in her evolution as the goddess of learning not only in India but also in some other neighbouring or eastern countries like Tibet, Java and Japan, where stone images of the goddess have been discovered. It is philosophically held that the river Sarasvatī represents the stream of knowledge of the eternal One, and as such she is the Logos, the Indian synonym for which is *vāc*, and thus could Sarasvatī, the river, be identified with *vāc*. In the Vedic literature the goddess Sarasvatī is often associated with two other goddesses, Iḍā and Bhāratī ; the commentators have sometimes interpreted the three goddesses as three aspects of the same goddess of speech. It is said that at one time both the Gandharvas (celestial minstrels) and the gods tried to win over the Vāg-devī by pleasing and propitiating her by songs and by playing on the lyre. These legends will give us the clue as to how Sarasvatī began to evolve as the goddess of learning and of all fine arts in later times.

Sarasvatī is generally described as a snow-white goddess with white garments, and every-

thing associated with her is white in keeping with her purity. In her most widely accepted icon of the present day she is seated on a white swan as her vehicle (*vāhana*).[1]

In the age of the Purāṇas the tendency was, as in the case of all other mother goddesses, to have the conception of Sarasvatī assimilated with the conception of Śakti ; as a result Sarasvatī was conceived as a particular aspect of the one all-pervading Power—the Great Mother. The most famous and sacred of all the *mantras*, composed in the *gāyatrī* metre and daily recited many times by the Brahmins, "We meditate on that venerable divine lustre of the Lord who is the generator of all—the earth, the intermediate atmosphere and the heaven : may He direct our intelligence!"—became personified later as the goddess Gāyatrī, as the wife of Brahmā (the primordial Creator), and as the mother of the four Vedas; and in later days this Gāyatrī became identified with Sarasvatī, the Vāg-devī.[2] According to one

1 Though Sarasvatī as the goddess of learning of later days is said to possess the swan as her *vāhana*, the swan is not the only *vāhana* of the goddess throughout the ages. Images of the goddess have been discovered where the lion is the *vāhana;* again in some images found in South India the goddess is found seated on the peacock , the lamb is also found as the *vāhana* of the goddess, and lambs were often sacrificed to her. These betoken her diverse affinities

2 It may be pointed out in this connection that the word *Saras* which is the first component part of the word Sarasvatī was taken by some of the commentators as a synonym for lustre ; according to that interpretation Sarasvatī means the goddess of lustre.

interpretation, the goddess Gāyatrī is the luminous emanation (*bhargas*) of the infinite power of the original One in three aspects in the three parts of the day, *viz.*, as Gāyatrī in the morning, as Sāvitrī at noon and as Sarasvatī in the evening.

As the goddess of learning she is sometimes said to be the daughter of Brahmā—the original creative agent—emanating from his mind (*mānasa-kanyā*): she is again described as the wife or the Śakti of Brahmā, and as such, she has, like Brahmā, the swan as her carrier. Somewhere she is described as emanating from the mouth of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, somewhere as the daughter of Śiva by Durgā. In the worship of Mother Durgā in autumn, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī accompany the Mother as the two daughters; or the three may represent the Śaktīs of Śivā, Viṣṇu and Brahmā. As Śakti, Sarasvatī has been associated with each of the Trinity—Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva—by turn. Sarasvatī finds a place as an important goddess in Buddhism as well as in Jainism with varying iconographical details. In later Buddhism, however, she is generally associated with Mañjuśrī, the god of learning. In the Buddhist liturgical texts she is variously described as Mahā-Sarasvatī, Āryavajra-Sarasvatī, Vajravīṇā-Sarasvatī, Vajra-Śāradā, etc. She presents a variety of names and iconographical differences in Jainism as well.

(IV) ŚRĪ ...

It will not be out of place, we think, to make here a brief survey of the evolution of the worship of another mother goddess, Lakṣmī or Śrī, the goddess of wealth and beauty. Her origin is traced to the fifteen verses, known as the hymn to Śrī (*Śrī-sūkta*), found appended to the regular collection of hymns of the fifth book of the *Ṛg-Veda*. These verses were referred to in the old texts of the early Pañcarātra Vaiṣṇavas and in many of the older Purānas. In the Śrī-sūkta the goddess Lakṣmī or Śrī is described as of the colour of a red lotus, seated on a red lotus and wearing a garland of red lotuses, and is herself called the deity of the lotus (Padmā). She is approached through the sacrificial fire to bestow on her devotees gold and domestic animals like cows and horses, to vouchsafe health, wealth, a good harvest, beauty, name and fame. The *Agni Purāṇa* traces four hymns of the goddess in the four Vedas. In the *White Yajur-Veda* (31. 22) Lakṣmī and Śrī are said to be two wives of Āditya; we find a corroboration of it in the Taittirīya school also. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* makes Lakṣmī emanate from Prajāpati (Brahmā). Originally, however, Lakṣmī or Śrī was most probably a harvest goddess, and as a matter of fact we find her identified with the earth in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*. Reference to the worship of Śrī is found in the *Dharma-sūtra* of Bodhā-

yana. She is referred to in a few verses of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. Images of Śrī or Lakṣmī are found in Bharhut and some other Buddhist centres ; her image and reference are found in a seal and some inscriptions of the Gupta period.[1] It seems that the worship of Lakṣmī as a mother goddess became established during the Gupta period.

The history of the mother goddess Lakṣmī seems to have taken a bifurcated course. On the one hand she became associated with Viṣṇu (as the all-pervading ultimate Lord) as his Śakti; on the other hand she seems to have come down to us in her original nature as the harvest goddess as associated with Mother Earth. The annual worship of the mother goddess falls on the autumnal full-moon day (known as the Kojāgarī Pūrṇimā), when, in some parts of the country, she is worshipped in the Navapatrikā referred to before. She is described in her worship as of the nature of corn and regarded as the presiding deity of the domestic realm as well as the corn field. A good number of Hindus, particularly the women-folk of the family, worship her as the domestic goddess of fortune and beauty. A vow is often observed in Bengal every Thursday in the evening, when all womenfolk of the family gather to recite versified stories proclaiming the power and

1 Dr. H. C. Raychaudhuri, *Materials for the Study of the Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Sect.*

glory of the mother goddess. In social and domestic life, women of gentleness and beauty, of unimpeachable character and other domestic and social virtues, are often respected as incarnations of the goddess Lakṣmī herself.

The philosophic conception of the mother goddess Lakṣmī is first found elaborately expounded probably in the literature of the Pañcarātra school of the early Vaiṣṇavas. Here Viṣṇu as Vāsudeva (the all-pervading Lord) is the Supreme Being who possesses infinite power in the form of knowledge, will and activity. This all-pervading power of the all-pervading Lord is Lakṣmī. Though ultimately one and the same with the Lord, she presents a semblance of duality in non-duality. In the Purāṇic literature we have a mass of legends and speculations concerning the origin of the goddess and her exact nature as the power and consort of Viṣṇu. Lakṣmī is sometimes seen here as particularly associated with a special aspect of Lord Viṣṇu, the Nārāyaṇa aspect, the Lord of the cosmos resting on the Śesa snake in the ocean of causal potency.

This Lakṣmī or Śrī as the mother goddess played a very important part in some of the Vaiṣṇavite sects of India, particularly in the Vaiṣṇavism of the South. The Śrī sect of Vaiṣṇavism, as the name itself will indicate, laid great stress on this mother aspect of the Viṣṇu-śakti. Just as in our domestic life the mother stands

somewhat like an intermediary between the father and the son, so does Lakṣmī stand as an intermediary between God and the Jīvas (beings), making the former compassionate and merciful to the latter and the latter dutiful and devoted to the former.

(V) DEVĪ

Of the Vedic hymns, the hundred and twenty-fifth hymn of the tenth *maṇḍala* (Book) of the *Ṛg-Veda* has, in later times, acquired a notability as being the origin of the Mother cult of India, and as such it is well known as the Devī-sūkta, or the hymn to the mother goddess. The whole hymn is an ecstatic exclamation of Vāc, the daughter of the sage Ambhṛṇa; through self-illumination she realized her complete identity with the great One (Brahman). In such a state she exclaimed, "It is I (as identical with Brahman) who move in the form of the Rudras, the Vasus, the Ādityas and all the other gods; I support both Mitra and Varuṇa, Agni and Indra, and the two Aśvins. I support the foe-destroying Soma (Moon), Tvaṣṭṛ, Pūṣan and Bhaga; I bestow on the institutor of the sacrifice, ready with oblations and offering homage to the gods, deserving wealth. I am the sovereign power (over all the worlds), bestower of all wealth, cognizant (of the supreme Being), and the first among those to whom sacrificial homage is to be offered; the gods

in all places worship but me, who am diverse in form and permeate everything. Whoever eats food, or sees, or breathes, or hears what is spoken, does it through me; those who do not know me thus perish. Hear, O worthy one, what I tell of —which should be known through faith and reverence. I myself am telling you of this (the truth), which is respected by gods and men alike; whom I will, I make great, I make him the Creator, I make him the seer, I make him the genius. I bend the bow of Rudra for slaying the ferocious enemy of the Brāhmaṇas; I wage war to protect the good, I pervade heaven and earth. I give birth to the infinite expanse overspreading the earth; my birth-place is in waters deep in the sea; therefrom do I permeate variously all the worlds, and touch the heaven above with my body. It is I who blow like the wind creating all the worlds; I transcend the heaven above, I transcend the earth below—this is the greatness I have attained."

The 'I' refers to the poetess of the hymn through whom the almighty glory of the primal Being has been proclaimed and with which she apparently identifies herself.

(VI) RĀTRI

Another Vedic hymn which is also associated with the Mother cult of later days is the hymn to the Night, the hundred and twenty-seventh

hymn in the tenth *maṇḍala* of the *Ṛg-Veda*. Here the Night has been invoked as a goddess (*devī*) who is the daughter of the heaven above, who pervades the worlds, who protects all beings from evils and gives them peaceful shelter in her lap just like the affectionate mother. This Night-goddess has been invoked also in the later *Sāma-vidhāna Brāhmaṇa* (3. 3. 8), where we find some of her traditional descriptions as the mother goddess. In later Purāṇic texts the Night is explained as coming forth from the *māyā* (creative power) of Brahman, and she is called Bhuvaneś-varī (the sovereign power over the worlds). The feminine conception of *rātri* (night) is found in the Brāhmaṇas. In Tāntrika philosophy, however, the night or the moon often symbolizes Śakti or the feminine aspect of the one non-dual truth of which the day as the sun represents the male aspect (Śiva). It has to be noted in this connection that there are various aspects of the Moon-goddess described in the Vedic literature. Sinī-vālī and Kuhū stand for the first and the second part respectively of the newmoon day, while Anumati and Rākā represent those parts respectively of the full-moon day (*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 7. 11; *Mahābhārata*, 8. 34. 32). It has even been suggested that most of the ancient goddesses were originally moon-goddesses, but developed later into goddess of fertility and generation. It is worthy of note also that many epithets ending

with the word *rātri* have been given to Durgā in the Caṇḍī chapters of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*.

(VII) AMBIKĀ, UMĀ, DURGĀ

Coming to the other Vedas, which are generally taken to be later in point of time, we find the mention of the goddess Ambikā in the *Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā* (*White Yajur-Veda*, 3, 57), where Ambikā is addressed as the sister of the god Rudra and is invoked to come and partake of her share in the sacrifice along with Rudra. The invocation is repeated in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (1. 6. 10. 4). In the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* (1. 10. 20)[1] this Ambikā has been said to be the sister as well as the *yoni* (mother? female counterpart?) of Rudra. In the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (1. 6. 10. 4) and both the *Maitrāyaṇī* and the *Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā* this Ambikā as the sister of Rudra has been identified with the autumn. Commentators have also identified Ambikā with the autumn, which betrays the fact that she was originally a harvest goddess; and when this Ambikā became identified with Durgā, the autumnal worship of the goddess became a widespread custom. We find a reference to the goddess Durgā of the colour of fire in an appendix to the *Ṛg-Veda* (Khila 10. 127) as also in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* (10. 1. 2). The *Hiraṇyakeśī*

1 Hamsarāja's Vedic Kośa, quoted in *The Mother Goddess*, p. 60 f. by S. K. Dikshit.

Gṛhya-sūtra mentions the name of the goddess Bhavānī (later on taken to be the wife of Śiva who was called Bhava) to whom sacrificial offerings were prescribed. The *Śāṅkhāyana Gṛhya-sūtra* mentions Bhadrakālī (generally identified with Caṇḍī and sometimes with Sarasvatī) as an insignificant goddess.

In the *Atharva-Veda* we find a hymn (6. 38) addressed plainly to the great mother goddess (*devī*). Two things may be specially noted in the hymn, viz. that the great goddess is the underlying brilliance and power in everything that possesses brilliance and power, and that she is the mother even of Indra, that is, the power underlying the might even of the mightiest of the gods. We next come across this great goddess in the *Kena Upaniṣad*, where also the goddess, dazzling in her divine splendour, reveals herself to Indra, the foremost of the gods. The goddess explained to Indra that the great incomprehensible One that gave victory to the gods against the Asuras (demons) was none but Brahman Itself, which was the real power behind everything and should in all cases be glorified.

Two points of great historical importance should not escape our eyes. In the first place, we see that the goddess was named Umā, one of the most famous names of the great goddess of India. Secondly, Umā is qualified by the word *haimavatī*, which has been philosophically interpreted

as of the golden hue, but which may historically be interpreted as belonging to the mountain Himavat, *i.e.*, the Himālayas. Umā seems to be a word of very obscure origin, and the proposed derivations are either arbitrary or esoteric. Thus it has been held that the vowel *u* means Śiva, and *mā* means to measure: the goddess who measures Śiva, that is, the Śakti of Śiva, is called Umā. Kālidāsa says in his *Kumāra-sambhava* that Pārvatī (the goddess as the daughter of the mountain) was dissuaded by her mother Menakā from resorting to austere penance for Śiva with the words "*u, mā*" (Oh, don't), and hence is the name Umā for Pārvatī. The *Hari-vaṃśa* gives her original name as Aparṇā. The view that Umā represents a variant of the syllable Om (the Praṇava) composed of the letters *a*, *u* and *m* and as such stands as the first symbol for the manifestation of the unmanifest. seems to be a later esoteric interpretation. The Babylonian Ummu or Umma, the Accadian. Ummi, and Dravidian Umma can be connected with each other and with Umā—all standing for the mother goddess.[1] In the coin of Huviṣka the goddess is found as 'Ommo'. The epithet Haimavatī used as an adjective most probably had some reference to her association with the Himālayas, either as her father or as her abode. In the Purāṇic Age she

1 S. K. Dikshit, *The Mother Goddess.*

is found associated with other mountains or peaks, e.g. the Vindhyas. She is sometimes associated with Mount Mandāra, or Meru, or Kailāsa. The most common epithet Pārvatī (or Girijā) attached to the great mother goddess of India lends support to the belief that she was originally a mountain goddess like the ancient mother goddesses of other countries. Pārvatī is also associated with the lion as her vehicle (*vāhana*), as some of the ancient mother goddesses of other countries were.

Though no other direct mention of the goddess Umā is found in the Āraṇyakas or the Upaniṣads, commentators have professed to discover Umā in a few passages of the Āraṇyakas. Thus the great commentator Sāyaṇācārya explained the word *soma* of the *Taittirīya Āraṇyakas* as the Lord accompanied by Umā (*umayā saha vartamānaḥ*), where Umā stands for the Knowledge of Brahman. Mahīdhara in his commentary on the *Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā* and Bhaṭṭa-bhāskara Miśra in his commentary on the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* also explain the word *soma* as shown above[1] - The word *Ambikā-pataye* (to the lord of Ambikā) is found in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, which has its variant as *Umāpataye* (the lord of Umā) in the Southern recension. The *Yājñikī Upaniṣad*, attached to the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, contains the

1 Bengali *Viśva-koṣa*.

famous *Gāyatrī* of the goddess Durgā,[1] viz. "We know the goddess Kātyāyanī (another name of Durgā, of which we shall speak later on), we meditate on the goddess Kanyā-kumārī (another name for Durgā) : may that godddess Durgā direct us ! " This text and similar other texts like the *Ṛk-pariśiṣta* (appendix to the *Rg-Veda*), *Bahvṛca Upaniṣad*, *Nārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*, *Devī Upaniṣad* etc. do not seem to have any claim to be recognized as older texts than the Purāṇas.

It is difficult to say with any degree of certainty if any ceremonial and ritualistic worship of the mother goddess in any of her popular forms as Durgā, Caṇḍī or Kālī was current in India during the Epic Age, we mean roughly the ages of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. In the first canto of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, however, we find mention of the goddess Umā, who is described as the daughter of the mountain Himālaya by his wife Menā (Menakā) and as the sister of the river Gaṅgā. This Umā is said to have been given in marriage to Mahādeva (Śiva) and is called in the *Rāmāyaṇa* the great goddess as the consort of Mahādeva. The story has been repeated also in *Mahābhārata*. We may further notice the men-

1 Corresponding to the Vedic pattern of the *Gāyatrī mantra*, most of the gods and goddesses of later times were credited with a *Gāyatrī mantra*. These generally possess three parts: in the first part it is said, "We know the god or goddess" (*vidmahe*); in the second part, "We meditate on him or her" (*dhīmahi*), and the third part says, "May he or she direct us!" (*pracodayāt*).

tion of the goddess Lakṣmī or Śrī several times in the *Rāmāyaṇa* generally as the Śakti of Viṣṇu. In the Sauptikaparva of the *Mahābhārata* we find a description of the dreadful goddess Kālī with black complexion, red eyes and face and body besmeared with blood and a noose as weapon. She is the Night of destruction (Kāla-rātri, and hence perhaps the association of the great mother goddess with the hymn to the Night of the *Ṛg-Veda*)—the goddess of destruction. In this connection we may refer to the Vedic goddess Nirṛti, who is also described in the Brāhmaṇa literature as a black and terrible goddess—the goddess of misfortunes—who is the generatrix and is fond of the cremation ground.

In the *Mahābhārata* there is also the mention of the worship of the mother goddess as Kātyāyanī (and a somewhat detailed description of her) by Pradyumna and also a hymn to the goddess Caṇḍī by Aniruddha. The most important, however, is the hymn to the goddess Durgā by King Yudhiṣṭhira. The hymn contains some descriptions of the goddess with which we are familiar in the Purāṇic Age. In some recensions of the text we find another hymn to Durgā chanted by Arjuna at the instance of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Scholars have doubted the authenticity of some at least, if not all, of these references in the *Mahābhārata*.

This Umā or Pārvatī, the Indian mountain goddess, seems to be the basis of the Purāṇic

magna mater, with whom most of the other mother goddesses, mostly indigenous in origin, were associated, or in whom, we may say, most of them have merged themselves. The evolution of the idea and philosophy of Śakti greatly helped this process of identification and unification. As the Śakti is fundamentally one, the mother must also be one; the mothers were necessarily intermingled and unified. Umā or Pārvatī as the consort or the inseparable counterpart of Lord Śiva seems to have attained wide prominence by the beginning of the Christian era. Umā-Maheśvara or Hara-Pārvatī drew almost universal respect in India as the primordial Father and Mother. Kālidāsa began his great epic *Raghu-vaṃśa* with a salute to Pārvatī-Parameśvara, the Mother and Father of the universe, who are said to be eternally and inseparably related to each other just as a word and its meaning are. In the *Kumāra-sambhava* he narrates how Umā obtained Mahādeva as her husband through austere penances. In this work of Kālidāsa we come across other very popular names of Umā, viz. Gaurī (yellowish white), Aparṇā (during her penance for Lord Śiva, not taking as her food even the leaves—*parṇa*—that fell from the trees). In this text we find mention also of the divine mothers,[1] who attended the

1 The divine mothers (Mātaraḥ or the Mātṛkās) are generally seven in number, viz. Brāhmī, or Brahmāṇī, Māheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vaiṣṇavī,

marriage procession of Śiva; and the direful goddess Kālī of the colour of deep dark clouds with her garland of human skulls followed these divine mothers. This description of Kālikā is repeated in the *Raghu-vaṃśa.*

In the *Kumāra-sambhava* we find reference to Dakṣa's daughter Satī attending a Vedic sacrifice arranged by her father, to which her husband Śiva was not invited, and committing suicide because of the insult offered to him by her father, with the determination of becoming the wife of Śiva in her next birth; accordingly, in her next birth as Umā, she obtained Śiva once more as her husband by dint of austere penance.

As for the other literary records which contain reference to the worship of the mother goddess in some of her many forms. mention may be made of the prose works *Vāsavadattā* of Subandhu (sixth or beginning of seventh century) and *Kādambarī* and *Harṣa-carita* of Bāṇabhaṭṭa (seventh century?), *Gauḍavaha* (a Prakrit work by Vākpatirāja of the eighth century) and *Mālatī-Mādhava*, a famous drama by Bhavabhūti, pro-

Vārāhī, Indrāṇī or Aindrī or Māhendrī and Cāmuṇḍā. Sometimes the number is given as eight and sometimes even as sixteen. We find mention of these Mātrkās in the Māhābhārata, where we find them in charge of attending on Skanda, son of Mahādeva Being closely associated with Śiva, these divine mothers came into prominence in the Purāṇas and the Tantras, and in places represented the great Mother herself or were treated as her aspects. In Tāntrika *sādhanā*, however, the Mātṛkās attained a deep significance. to which we shall come later on.

bably of the eighth century. The mother goddesses that are described in these texts seem to be indigenous in origin and to have their worshippers mainly among the lower strata of the then Indian society, and they were to be propitiated with animal sacrifices—with wine, meat and blood. The *Gauḍavaha*, mentioned above, records the worship by the non-Aryan Śabaras of Parṇa-śabarī—a goddess residing in the Vindhya mountain, who was so named because of the fact that she wore only leaves (*parṇa*). In the *Kādambarī* of Bāṇabhaṭṭa we find the worship of the goddess by the Śabaras. *Khila-Hari-vaṃśa* (an appendix to the *Mahābhārata*) says that the goddess Durgā was worshipped by savages like the Śabaras, Barbaras and Pulindas, and that she was very fond of meat and wine. What seems to be beyond doubt is that roughly between the beginning of the Christian era and the tenth century A.D., many local and indigenous goddesses pushed themselves from the social sub-strata to find a place in the Hindu pantheon, and by a process of generalization, both religious and philosophical, were fused together and treated as aspects of the one universal mother goddess. It is not, therefore, a fact, as is sometimes wrongly conceived, that the many mother goddesses are later emanations from the one mother goddess; on the contrary, the one mother goddess of the Purāṇic Age seems to be a consolidation of the

many mother goddesses—a consolidation brought about by the philosophy of Śakti.

3. The Principle of Śakti

It is therefore proper that before dealing in detail with the mother goddess of the Purāṇic period we should say a few words as to the origin and development of the idea of Śakti in India.

In the Indian idea of Śakti we find a happy blending of two elements, one empirical and the other speculative. On the empirical side the idea of Śakti is associated with the idea of cosmogony. It has been the uncontradicted experience of man from the dawn of his understanding that there cannot be any origination whatsoever unless there is the union of the two—the male and the female. Human analogy was naturally extended to the origination of the universe as a whole, and thus man came to the idea of the primordial Father and the primordial Mother. As we have seen, in the primitive condition of society the mother held the most important position, and thus the cosmic mother became the most important deity. In India, from the ages of the Indus Civilization of Mohenjo-daro and Harappā down to the present time, the father God is represented by the *liṅga* (the male symbol) and the mother Goddess by the *yoni* (the female symbol). This representation of Śiva-Śakti by the *liṅga-yoni* is

a popular religious practice in India, and in most of the ancient and modern temples of Śiva the twin are worshipped in their symbolic representations. In the Tantra literature (both Hindu and Buddhist) the Lord (Bhagvān, the male deity) is symbolically represented by a white dot (*śveta-bindu*), thus suggesting the likeness with semen, while the Creatrix (Bhagavatī, the female deity) is represented by a red dot (*śoṇa-bindu*), to suggest the analogy with the menstrual blood containing the ovum.

(*i*) *In Philosophy*

From the speculative side it was observed that everything that existed, existed by virtue of its power or powers. So God, who exists as the creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe, must possess infinite power through which He creates, preserves and destroys the universe. In fact, His very being presupposes infinite power by virtue of which He Himself exists. This belief in the power of God is a universal belief; but what lends it a specially Indian colour is the dominant tendency of the Indians to view this power or universal energy as something like a female counterpart of the possessor of this power. This power or *śakti*, being conceived as a counterpart of the possessor of *śakti*, came to be recognized frankly as the consort of the possessor. This is responsible for the fact that not only

among the Śāktas (believers in Śakti in whatever form as the supreme deity) but in almost all other religious sects—the Śaivas (believers in Śiva as the supreme deity), the Sauras (believers in the Sun-god as the supreme deity), the Gāṇapatyas (believers in Gaṇapati or Gaṇeśa as the supreme deity) and the Vaiṣṇavas (believers in Viṣṇu or any of his incarnations as the supreme deity)—an important place is occupied by Śakti. There is seldom a god or a semi-god or a demi-god of India of the Purāṇic Age for whom a consort has not been conceived as the inseparable Śakti. The same has been the case with all the gods, semi-gods and demi-gods of the later phase of Mahāyāna Buddhism.[1]

A strong belief in this Śakti has brought about a popular synthesis among contrary philosophies like Sāmkhya, Vedānta, Vaiṣṇavism and Tāntrikism. Sāṃkhya speaks of Puruṣa and Prakṛti as two independent and ultimate reals whose interaction is, in fact, a mere attribution resulting from the accidental contact of the two. In the Purāṇas and similar other popular religious literature, Prakṛti is plainly conceived as the female counterpart of Puruṣa, and as such the two reals have been practically identified with

1 In this connection the following books may be consulted: (i) *Indian Buddhist Iconography* by B. Bhattacharyya, (ii) *Gods of Northern Buddhism* by A. Getty, (iii) *An Introduction to Tāntric Buddhism* by the present author.

Śakti and Śiva of the Tantras. Just in a similar manner the principle of *māyā* (illusion) of Vedānta has been conceived as the Śakti of Brahman. These pairs have again been identified with Viṣṇu and his Śakti, Lakṣmī or Śrī, with Rāma and Sītā, and still later with Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. Thus in the popular religious belief of India, Śiva-Śakti of the Tantras, Puruṣa-Prakṛti of Sāṃkhya, Brahman-Māyā of Vedānta, and Viṣṇu-Lakṣmī, Rāma-Sītā and Kṛṣṇa-Rādhā of Vaiṣṇavism all mean the same.

The philosophy of Śakti is clearly suggested by two passages in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (1, 4. 1, 3), where it is said that in the beginning was the Ātman (Soul) in human form, who could never feel happy (*i.e.* enjoy himself through any process of self-realization), for he was all alone. So he desired a second to him. His being was something like a neutral point where the ultimate principles of the male and the female lay unified in a deep embrace, as it were. This unified being divided himself into two—as the male and the female, which formed the first pair, and all the pairs of the universe are said to be replicas of this original pair. These passages of the *Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* have been extensively made use of in the Purāṇas, in the Tantras as also in the later Buddhist and Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā schools, in which the idea of Śakti played an important part. Whatever has been created in this

phenomenal process has been created from the union of the two—energy and matter, the consumer and the consumed. They represent the two aspects of the one non-dual truth—one internal and the other external—one illuminating, unchangeable and immortal (*amṛta*), and the other obstructive, gross and perishable; the one the cause-potency and the other the effect-potency. In the Śaiva and Śākta Tantras, *prāṇa-rayi* of the *Praśna Upaniṣad* (1. 4) or *agni-soma* stand for Śiva-Śakti—the primordial male and female.

Distinct mention of the various powers of God is found in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, in which it is said in one place, "Various powers are heard of this (Brahman). It possesses power as knowledge and power as force or activity by virtue of its very nature" (6. 8). Again, "Know *māyā* (the unspeakable mysterious power of God) as Prakṛti (Nature) and the possessor of *māyā* as the Great Lord (Maheśvara, an epithet, specially used in later times, of Śiva)" (4. 10). Again it is said, "He who is one and colourless brings forth various colours through the agency of his various types of powers" (4. 1.). The possessor of *māyā* (*māyin*) created the universe, and the beings are fettered by his *māyā*.

(ii) *In Vaiṣṇavism and Saivism*

The elaboration of this *Śakti-vāda* is to be found in most of the Purāṇas, Upapurāṇas, Saṃ-

hitās and mainly in the Tantras, both Hindu and Buddhist. There is no systematic discussion on the philosophy of Śakti in the Purāṇas, even in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, which contains the *Caṇḍī*, the most important text with the mother worshippers of India; discussions on Śakti in the Purāṇas are sporadic and scrappy. The main discussions are to be found in the Tantra literature, both Hindu and Buddhist, which, in our opinion, is fundamentally the same. So far as the Hindu Tantras are concerned, they seem to have flourished mainly in the two extreme borders of India, in Kāśmīr in the north-western border and in Bengal, the easternmost province. So far as the Tāntrika literature of Bengal is concerned, scholars are disposed to think that none of these texts was composed earlier than the tenth century A.D. The tradition of the Tantras composed in Kāśmīr, however, seems to be earlier. The well known Trika school of Kāśmīr Śaivism seems to have derived many of its ideas from the older Tantras of Kāśmīr, some of which have been quoted and referred to in important texts of Śaivism. The Kāśmīr school of Śaivism most probably flourished during the period between the ninth and the tenth century A.D. Some of the Tāntrika texts must have been composed earlier. But it has to be noted that some of the Saṃhitā texts belonging to the Pañcarātra school of Vaiṣṇavism

(sometimes referred to in the Trika school of Kāśmīr Śaivism) were composed earlier than the Śaivite texts, and the *Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā*, belonging to the Pañcarātra school, contains a good exposition of the philosophy of Śakti, though of course of Śakti as associated with Viṣṇu and not Śiva. It has been said in this text that the ultimate Being has got two aspects, one of which is the inactive or negative state, where all His creative impulses lie dormant in Him, and the whole universe lies infinitely contracted in Him as a mere potency and possibility. This negative state may be said to be a state of nothingness, inasmuch as there is no self-realization through self-activity. Even in this state there is Śakti, but she remains perfectly absorbed in the Lord, as if in a union of deep embrace. With the urge of the first creative impulse there comes within the Lord a determination (*saṃkalpa*), which results in His will; this will of the Lord may be recognized as the first vibration of the Śakti of the Lord—the first cosmic rhythm in the absolutely calm and quiet ocean. The relation of this Śakti with the Lord is just like the inseparable relation of the sun or the moon with its rays, of the fire with its heat and sparks, of the sea with its ripples. When Śakti first awakes from her absorption in deep embrace into the first vibration of activity, she acquires something like an independence and tends to manifest herself in

her triple functions, viz. willing (*icchā*), knowing (*jñāna*) and activity (*kriyā*). These triple ways in which the Śakti functions are at the basis of the triangular diagram, the *yantra* of the mother goddess. Sometimes it has been held that Śakti is nothing but a figurative representation of the Lord; for the power can never be viewed as separate from the agent that possesses the power. The rise or awaking of Śakti, therefore, really means the awaking of the Lord from His infinitely contracted state to the state of full-fledged I-ness (*pūrṇa-ahaṃtā*); Śakti is thus the full 'I-ness' of God. She is of the nature of infinite bliss, the bliss that follows from the self-realization of God through self-activity. In the state of absolute oneness the Lord realizes this bliss of Śakti as one realizes bliss by deeply embracing his wife and forgetting everything else. This Śakti can again be viewed in two of her aspects, viz. the internal aspect in which she co-exists with the Lord and in the Lord (*samavāyinī* Śakti), and the external aspect in which she, as Nature (Prakṛti), and as the repository of the three natural qualities (*i.e.* the three *guṇas*, viz. *sattva* or the intelligence stuff, *rajas*, energy stuff, and *tamas*, inertia), manifests herself as the external universe.

According to the Tāntrika texts of Kāśmīr also Śakti inheres in the ultimate Being as a latent potency of infinite possibilities—as a seed, as it were, of the future worlds—mobile and

immobile. As the ultimate Being is real and eternal, so is Śakti who is co-existent with Him. The awaking of Śakti is something like a self-projection of the I-ness of God which is accompanied by an internal process of self-creation for the sake of sporting; the only aim of Śakti is to satisfy the Lord by all means—and for this reason the Lord frequently disturbs her equilibrium intentionally. This Śakti has sometimes been described as the clear looking-glass through which the Lord sees and enjoys Himself; Śiva is the abstract thinking principle which finds itself reflected in the concrete wall (*kuḍya*) of Śakti. She is called Kāmeśvarī since she fulfils all the desires (*kāma*) of the Lord.

(iii) As Related to Śiva and Śakti

We need not enter into any more detailed study of the philosophy of Śakti as is found in other Tāntrika literature of different types and of different times; but three different views on the relation between Śiva and Śakti, propounded in the Purāṇas and the Tantras, must be clearly brought out. The first view holds that neither Śiva nor Śakti represents the absolute truth; the Absolute Reality is a state of neutrality where Śiva and Śakti remain in a state of perfect union (*yāmala*); this is called the *sāmarasya*, where all things become one in a unity of blissful realization. Śiva and Śakti are two aspects of the

same truth—the static and the dynamic, the negative and the positive, the abstract and the concrete, the male and the female. In the Buddhist Tantras the *Advaya Bodhicitta*, the non-duel perfectly illumined consciousness, is the highest truth from which flow the two currents of *śūnyatā* (perfect knowledge of the essencelessness of things) and *karuṇā* (universal compassion), or *prajñā* (perfect enlightenment) and *upāya* (expedience). *Prajñā* is static, the negative aspect of the truth, while *upāya* is dynamic, the positive aspect; the *prajñā* and *upāya* of the Buddhist Tantras stand for the same truth as the Śakti and Śiva of the Hindu Tantras, with this peculiarity that, unlike the Hindu Tantras, the Buddhist Tantras call the static or negative aspect of the truth the female, and the dynamic or positive aspect the male.[1]

The second view, however, holds that Śiva is the ultimate Being to whom Śakti eternally belongs. Nevertheless, neither Śiva nor Śakti is real without the other; as Śakti cannot be conceived of without the possessor of Śakti, so also Śiva becomes *śava* (dead) without Śakti. The two are therefore eternally and inseparably connected. The third view makes Śakti the highest truth, and Śiva is conceived of as the best support of Śakti. Śakti is the more important as the con-

1 For details, see *An Introduction to Tāntric Buddhism* by the present writer.

tained, while Śiva is the container. Śakti is the all-creating, all-preserving and all-destroying power of which Śiva is the best container (*ādhāra*). In some of the Purāṇas the male deity as the *śaktimat* (the possessor of Śakti) has been described as the male aspect of the ultimate truth, the Śakti. It is from this point of view that the Mother worshippers would give a subsidiary place to Śiva, whereas Śakti as the Mother is taken to be the highest object of adoration. In this her sovereign majesty, the goddess is sometimes called the Lalitā Devī[1] from whom the male deity proceeds as a transformation of her own self. She is also called Tripurasundarī in the Tantras.

(*iv*) *In Śrī Aurobindo's Philosophy*

The great goddess, taken generally as the power of the Supreme, or, according to Śrī Aurobindo, the great Mother worshipper of the twentieth century, the conscious force of the Supreme, has different aspects of her emanations and manifestations. The first is the "Transcendent, the original supreme Shakti ; she stands above the worlds and links the creation to the ever unmanifest mystery of the Supreme."[2]

1 Apart from this philosophical conception of the goddess as Lalitā, Lalitā often stands as the general mother goddess of India. The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* gives us a detailed account of the great goddess as Lalitā, but space prevents us from going into details.

2 Śrī Aurobindo, *The Mother*, p 37.

"Alone, she harbours the absolute Power and the ineffable Presence ; containing or calling the Truths that have to be manifested, she brings them down from the Mystery in which they were hidden into the light of her infinite consciousness and gives them a form of force in her omnipotent power and her boundless life and a body in the universe."[1] The second is the "Universal, the cosmic Mahashakti : she creates all these beings and contains and enters, supports and conducts all these million processes and forces."[2] The third is the individual Śakti, who "embodies the power of these two vaster ways of her existence, makes them living and near to us and mediates between the human personality and the divine Nature."[3]

Again, it has been said in the Purāṇas and the Tantras that the great goddess or the Original Nature (*mūla-prakṛti*) works in the creative realm in three of her personalities, each of which emanates from her ; with the preponderance of *sattva* emanates the goddess Mahāsarasvatī, with *rajas* the goddess Mahālakṣmī and with *tamas* the goddess Mahākālī. Śrī Aurobindo interprets four great aspects of the Mother in the following way. "Four great Aspects of the Mother, four of her leading Powers and Personalities have stood in front in her guidance of this Universe and in her dealings with the terrestrial

1 Śrī Aurobindo, *The Mother*, p. 38. 2 *Ibid.* p. 37.
3 *Ibid.*

play. One is her personality of calm wideness and comprehending wisdom and tranquil benignity and inexhaustible compassion and sovereign and surpassing majesty and all-ruling greatness. Another embodies her power of splendid strength and irresistible passion, her warrior mood, her overwhelming will, her impetuous swiftness and world-shaking force. A third is vivid and sweet and wonderful with her deep secret of beauty and harmony and fine rhythm, her intricate and subtle opulence, her compelling attraction and captivating grace. The fourth is equipped with her close and profound capacity of intimate knowledge and careful flawless work and quiet and exact perfection in all things . . . . To the four we give the four great names, Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati."[1]

(*v*) *In The Purāṇas* : *Caṇḍī Śaptaśatī*

Śakti as the great mother and the highest truth has found an elaborate exposition in the Devī-māhātmya (glory of the goddess) section of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, and this portion of the Purāṇa, consisting of thirteen chapters (from the eighty-first to the ninety-third) is regarded as the most sacred text of the Mother worshippers of India and is well known as the *Caṇḍī*.

1 Śrī Aurobindo, *The Mother*, pp. 48-50.

In the story the goddess has been mainly styled as the Devī, *i.e.*, the great goddess ; but the Devī became well known in later times as Durgā. The name Durgā has variously been interpreted in the Purāṇic and Tāntrika literature, the import of which is that she is the mother goddess who saves us all from all sorts of misery and affliction—from all sorts of dangers and difficulties. She is also called Caṇḍī—the fierce goddess, as she incarnates herself whenever occasion demands for the purpose of destroying the Asuras (demons) who may threaten the mental peace and the heavenly domain of the divine beings. This Durgā is the great mother goddess whose worship during the autumnal season is the most celebrated religious function of the Bengalee Hindus. She is worshipped, as we have already pointed out, also as Annapūrṇā or Annadā—the goddess of corn and food.[1] Near about the autumn she is also worshipped as Jagaddhātrī, *i.e.*, the maintainer or fosterer of the world. During the spring she is worshipped as Vāsantī, *i.e.*, the spring goddess. This Durgā or rather the Devī of the Purāṇic period has assimilated within her all the then prevalent mother goddesses of India, most of whom, as we have indicated before, were indigenous local goddesses. In some of the Purāṇas the Devī[1]

1 The similiarity of this goddess Annapūrnā with the ancient Italian goddess Anna Perenna, at least in name, is noteworthy.

is said to be worshipped in one hundred and eight names in one hundred and eight sacred places all over India.[1] In some texts there is an attempt at enumerating the thousand names of the goddess. Even a cursory glance at these lists will convince one that some of these names represent the different attributes of the goddess, while others point to the fact that they are local goddesses later on generalized and merged in one great mother goddess.

In the Devī-kavaca[2] attached to the *Caṇḍī*,[3] the Devī as Navadurgā is described as Śailaputrī (the daughter of the mountain), Brahmacariṇī, Candraghaṇṭā, Kuṣmāṇḍā, Skandamātā (the mother of Skanda), Kātyāyanī, Kālarātri, Mahāgaurī and Siddhidātrī. The mothers are Cāmuṇḍā seated on the corpse, Vārāhī on the buffalo, Aindrī on the elephant, Vaiṣṇavī on Garuḍa (the bird), Nārasiṃhī, Śivadūtī, Māheśvarī seated on the bull, Kaumārī on the peacock, Lakṣmī on the lotus. Īśvarī, the white goddess, on the bull

1 Thus in the *Matsva Purāṇa* (Ch. 13) it is said, though she is all-pervading and underlies all the forms, the devotees desirous of attaining perfection should worship her in different places in different forms and names as enumerated. A similar list is found in the *Padma* and some other Purāṇas also.

2 The word *kavaca* means an armour ; as used to denote a hymn to a goddess, it is believed to shield the reciter from miseries, dangers and difficulties.

3 Some ascribe it to the *Mārkandeya Purāṇa*, some to the *Varāha Purāṇā* and some to the Tāntrika text *Rudra-yāmala*.

and Brāhmī on the swan. There are a host of other names of different descriptions. Sir R. G. Bhandarkar has rightly remarked in this connection, "In the account here given, it will be seen that there is one goddess with a number of different names. But the critical eye will see that they are not merely names, but indicate different goddesses who owed their conception to different historical conditions, but who were afterwards identified with the one goddess by the usual mental habit of the Hindus."[1] Many of the goddesses are but different Śaktis, associated with the different godheads of India, including Varāha (the boar-god) and Narasiṃha (the man-lion god). Some of them are probably added from the stock of the aboriginal non-Aryans. Thus, for instance, the goddess Cāmuṇḍā is perhaps a non-Aryan blood-thirsty goddess, as early references to her would show. Bhandarkar thinks that Kātyāyanī is the tutelary goddess of the Kātyas, as Kauśikī is the goddess of the Kauśikas. To the names Śākambharī, Bhrāmarī etc. we have referred before.

The question of the adoption and assimilation of some ot the Buddhist goddesses has also been suggested in this connection. For instance, Tārā, a popular goddess with the Hindus, is a famous Buddhist goddess. Chinnamastā may be said to

1 Bhandarkar, *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, p. 205.

be a Hindu version of the Buddhist goddess Vajra-yoginī. Parṇa-śabarī is also a well known Buddhist goddess. But the epithet 'Buddhist goddess' has to be used and understood with a little caution. Most of the goddesses, whether Hindu or Buddhist or Jain, are but Indian goddesses, mostly of indigenous origin, accepted and associated at different times and localities with different religious systems or beliefs. The only question in this connection, however, is whether a particular goddess was first recognized in this or that religion, and whether she found her place in one religion of India *via* another.

It will not be out of place here to mention the tradition of the fifty-one *pīṭhas* (sacred places). When the great Mother in her incarnation as Satī, daughter of Daksa, threw away her body in yoga as a protest against her father's insulting her husband, Mahādeva (the great god) took the dead body of his beloved consort on his shoulder and began to roam about in the three worlds, mad in grief. This disturbed the universe, creating chaos, to prevent which Viṣṇu came forward with his weapon of discus and from behind the great god cut the body of the mother goddess Satī into fifty-one pieces, which fell in fifty-one places of India, thus making them great centres of Mother worship. This legend also seems to be another attempt at assimilating all the mother goddesses of India into one—the great goddess. There is

the other legend of the mother goddess Satī transforming herself into ten goddesses with a view to frightening the great god (Mahādeva) to obtain permission from him for going to attend the sacrifice arranged by her father Dakṣa. These ten goddesses are known as the ten Mahāvidyās (ten great aspects of the supreme knowledge).[1] Scholars are disposed to think that these ten Mahāvidyās are ten different indigenous goddesses who have been later on associated with and assimilated to the great mother goddess with the help of both legend and theology. The *sādhakas* (spiritual aspirants), on the other hand, would take them as different aspects of the same great Mother, Śakti, suited to the taste, temperament and mental level of the *sādhakas*.

So far as the ceremonial and ritualistic worship of the great mother goddess Durgā is concerned, Bengal leads the other provinces of India. In the annual worship of the Mother in her earthen image especially constructed on the occasion, the Mother is generally represented as Mahiṣa-mardinī, or as trampling under her feet and killing Mahiṣāsura (the buffalo-demon) as narrated in the Caṇḍī. She has the lion as her *vāhana* (carrier) and is accompanied by Jayā and Vijayā (said to be identical with the goddesses Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī) as her daughters and Gaṇeśa (the god who

1 These are Kālī, Tārā, Sodaśi, Bhuvaneśvarī, Bhairavī, Chinnamastā, Dhūmāvatī, Vagalā, Mātaṅgī and Kamalā.

grants all success) and Kārttika (the commander-in-chief of the gods) as her sons ranged on her two sides. Kālī is the other popular mother goddess of Bengal, who is worshipped daily in many old temples, and whose annual worship falls in the dark night of the new moon (*amāvasyā*) about three weeks after the autumnal worship of Mother Durgā.

We need not enter into the ritualistic details of the various kinds of worship prescribed in a host of Purāṇic and Tāntrika texts composed at different times. Besides the *bīja-mantras* (monosyllabic words believed to be the sound representations of the different gods and goddesses) there are a great many other *mantras*, believed to be pregnant with some mystic potency, which to our modern mind may indeed sound as unmeaning jargon. There are various other elements—postures and gestures, songs and dances, pageantry and revelry—that accompany the Mother worship. There is again the belief in some goddesses associated with particular dreadful diseases; this belief seems to be common to humanity as a whole, irrespective of geographical and racial differences. In India we have the belief in the goddess of serpents, Manasā, or Viṣaharī, who is again associated with septic ulcers of a pernicious type; there is the goddess of small-pox (called Śītalā in some localities), of cholera (the goddess Kālī is in some localities associated with it), of child

diseases (the goddess Ṣaṣṭhī, who is the patroness of children, is sometimes associated with these), and so on.

Mother worship in India, and particularly in Bengal, has to be viewed in the aspect in which it has deepened the religious consciousness of the people and thus moulded their sense of higher values. It is through this process that it can add a colour and quality to the very culture of the people. The mother goddess could stir the life and intellect of the people of the country mainly through the philosophy of Śakti, to which we have briefly referred before, and a nice exposition of which is found in the *Caṇḍī* itself.

The story of the *Caṇḍī* first introduces the great Mother as the principle of great illusion (*mahāmāyā*) which prevents us from viewing things of life and the world around from the real perspective; it creates in our defiled mind a fierce attachment to the objects of the world and thus binds us down to a lower plane of existence, the plane of miseries and afflictions. But whence is this principle of objective illusion? It is an aspect of the same divine Power which is responsible for the whole creative process, and which is shaping the universe eternally to its end. It was there as one with the supreme Being even when the cosmos was not, and it remains there absorbed in the very existence of the supreme Being even after the dissolution of the universe—

as a potency, as a seed of future creative manifestation. It has its sway not only on all animates and inanimates but also on the supreme Being, and in connection with the later it is called *yoga-māyā*, the *māyā* directly in touch with the Lord. This *mahāmāyā* as the *mahāśakti* (great Power) remains absolutely inactive at the time of dissolution, and this inactivity of the Śakti lulls the supreme Being to profound sleep, as it were, in the ocean of causal potency. She is the Mahākālī, since she contracts eternal time (*kāla*) within her and from her time proceeds again as an endless flow of creative vibration. It will not be right to consider this Power as a mere spiritual entity; she is the Power—spiritual, moral and mental, the Power—biological and physiological as well as grossly physical. Whatever there is, is due to her, whatever works, works because of her.

As on the one hand all our spiritual aspirations and activities for the realization of the highest bliss proceed from her, so also do all the states and processes of our mind, including all higher intellection, emotion and conation as well as our animal instincts and urges. She manifests herself again in and through all the bio-motor activities which we call the life-process, and through the laws of Nature. It is because of this that in the hymns to the great goddess by the gods we find that she is the *mantra* for offering oblations to the gods and the fathers; she is the

praṇava (Om) and its three component parts (a, u, and m); she is the *gāyatrī* and the subtle *mantras* that escape vocal articulation; she is the almighty Power solely responsible for the creation, preservation and destruction of the universe. As she is the supreme knowledge (*mahāvidyā*) and great mental vigour as understanding (*mahāmedhā*), so also is she great forgetfulness and great attachment. She is the great power of the gods and the demons. She is grace in everything that is graceful ; she is the real power in everything that is powerful; she is the sense of shame as also shyness; she is the vigour in our intellect; she is the giver of our nourishment; she is contentment, peace of mind and forbearance. She is fierceness in war and contest, and again she is in the tenderest of our sentiments. She is prosperity in the house of the honest, and ruin in the house of the evil-minded ; she is in all our wisdom and merit ; she is in all our ignorance and vice ; she is in Brahmā, the first created and the greatest, and she is equally in the smallest of insects ; she is in our highest state of liberation and bliss ; she is in the worst state of bondage and suffering; she shines in the best of smiles, and she darkens everything by the most terrific frowns.

What, then, is the significance of Mother worship to a real *sādhaka*? To feel that he and his universe are nothing but media for the mani-

festation of one all-pervading Power—the Power of God, the Power that is one with God. Not merely to understand intellectually, but to realize in each and every one of his cells that he lives and moves and has his being in the divine Power that is both immanent and transcendent. All spiritual endeavours of a true devotee of Śakti aim at the realization that his self, including his body, mind and spirit, is an instrument through which the great Mother produces the song of life—a song infinitely varied in tunes and melodies. There is thus a feeling of all-pervading oneness—a *sāmarasya* in the widest and the truest sense of the term—where there no longer remains any within or without. In the *Caṇḍī*, therefore, the worshippers in their hours of exaltation invoke the Mother all around them as also above and below them—the Mother who is perfect within and perfect without.

The *Caṇḍī* is full of battles between the Mother on one side and the prominent *Asuras* (demons) with their hosts on the other. To an aspirant the whole thing is but an allegorical representation of the continual war that is going on within between the divine and the demoniac in man. Every dominant passion or instinct has its special array—a truth symbolized by the chief demons and their respective armies. Our passions and instincts, as has been convincingly demonstrated by modern psycho-analysis, whenever they are in

danger of being eradicated or suppressed, change their form and colour and try to escape in disguise. This has been illustrated by the story of some of the demons changing their shape when challenged by Śakti, the divine Power. The other fact is that so deep-rooted the passions and the instincts are in us that they often seem to be indestructible, since one that is killed is replaced at once by another, and so on. This is well illustrated by the goddess's fight with the demon Raktabīja, from whose every drop of blood shed on the ground sprouted a demon with fresh vigour and ferocity. It is the awakening of the Mother within, that is, full consciousness of the divine Power working in and through him, that makes man strong and surcharged with the immense power of God.

(*vi*) *In The Tantras*

The significance of the Mother worship, therefore, lies in the *sādhanā*--the practical endeavour for the realization of the truth. Because of the sole importance of this, Mother worship in India has been closely related to the Tantras. A vagueness thickens round the word Tantra as used in common parlance. But without being entangled in its mesh of heterogeneous elements, we may say that while the different philosophic systems deal with the nature of reality and the proper method for its realization, the whole emphasis

of the Tantra, as a religious science, is on the practical methods for realizing the truth. How can the Mother be realized? "Mainly through *yantras* and *mantras*," will be the reply of a Tāntrika.

We may, for our purpose, describe the *mantras* of the Mother as the sound-representations of the Mother. In the process of becoming of the Being, the first stage, we have noticed, is marked by self-activity in the form of determination (*saṃkalpa*), which results in a will; this will develops itself into a full-fledged 'I-ness' (*ahaṃtā*) of God, which is the state of Śakti. The next stage is a stage of sound (*nāda*), cosmic vibration or rhythm, which finds further expression in the visible world-process. The letters of the alphabet are the perceptible forms of the differentiated cosmic vibrations. These letters are, therefore, called not the Mother herself, but Mātṛkās, the mothers who attend the great Mother and approximate her to a great extent. The Purāṇic conception of the Mātṛkās thus underwent a great transformation in the Tantras. Rāmprasād, a great worshipper of the Mother and a Bengalee devotional poet of the eighteenth century, explained in an exquisite lyric that Kālī, the Mother, contains in her the fifty letters (the Indian vowels and consonants), and she takes a name in every one of the letters. In the Tāntrika way of worshipping the Mother there is a practice called

aṅga-nyāsa, or the consecration of the different parts of the body to the Mother. In this there is the custom of placing the different letters, both vowels and consonants, as the Mātṛkās on the different parts of the body. The significance is to feel that every part even of the physical body, with all the biological processes going on within, belongs really to the Mother and nothing to the man who is said to possess the body.

Yantra means a machine or medium through which the truth is to be realized. The human body is, according to the Tāntrikas, the best medium for realizing the truth. This body is not merely a thing in the universe, it is an epitome of the universe, a microcosm in relation to the macrocosm. There is therefore nothing in the universe which is not there in the body of a man. With this idea in view the Tāntrika *sādhakas* have tried to discover the most important rivers in the nerve-system of man, the mountains specially in the spinal chord, and the prominent *tīrthas* (holy places) in different parts of the body, and the sun and the moon—time-element of the exterior universe in all its phases as day and night, fortnight, month and year—have often been explained with reference to the course of the vital wind (*prāṇa* and *apāna*, exhalation and inhalation). The human form is thus the abode of the truth of which the universe is the manifestation in infinite space and eternal time. Instead of

being lost in the vastness of the incomprehensible universe and groping in its unfathomable mystery, a Tāntrika *sādhaka* prefers to concentrate his attention on himself and to realize the truth hidden in this body with the clear conviction that the truth that is realized within is the same truth that pervades and controls the whole universe.

The great Mother has two polar extremities: one the grossly physical plane, where she seems to be shrouded by her own created matter, coiled and fast asleep ; the other is her perfectly awakened state, the state of highest bliss and illumination, which is one and the same with Śiva, the Godhead. According to Tāntrika *sādhanā*, the *mūlādhāra-cakra* (sacro-coccygeal plexus), the lowest of the plexuses, represents this gross physical plane while the *sahasrāra*, the highest plexus in the cerebral region, represents the plane of perfect divine realization. The *sādhanā* consists first in awakening the Mother in the lowest plane, and this rousing of the Mother in a yogic process enables one to find out the Mother in the lowest plane, even in the lowest form of animal existence. The upward motion of the Mother is then realized in and through all the intermediate states, and the supreme realization is attained in the highest plane. The *sādhanā* does not end here; the realization of the Mother as supreme bliss and illumination must not be kept confined in the

highest plane alone; the perfect realization of the Mother must be made possible in all the lower planes, even in the lowest. The implication in a wider sphere is that religion, in the form of perfect divine realization, must not be pursued merely through a process of negation—a negation of the lower, even the lowest plane of our animal existence; the lowest and the highest must be made equal by the perfect realization of the Mother equally everywhere.

This truth seems to have been demonstrated in the life of Rāmprasād, who made the great Mother, as the popular tradition goes, come down to him in flesh and blood in the form of his beloved young daughter and help him in the construction of his thatched hut.

4. Reputed Śakta Sādhakas

The *sādhanā* of Rāmprasād and numerous other *sādhakas* of the eighteenth and earlier centuries found fulfilment and wider expression in the life and teachings of Srī Ramakṛṣṇa of Dakṣiṇeśvar in the nineteenth century. It often seems an interesting paradox to the ordinary mind how a Brahmin priest, worshipping the stone image of Mother Kālī in a temple of Bengal, should succeed in raising a common platform where all the religions may meet. The paradox can be solved only by understanding the true nature of the Mother as conceived by these Indian

saints, and also by understanding the true significance of the worship of the Mother. To Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa as well as to Rāmprasād, of whose devotional lyrics on the Mother and her worship Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa was very fond, the Mother was the same as Brahman, the Absolute. But to Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa the Absolute was true—and equally so —in all its aspects—as the unqualified as also the qualified, as the inactive as also the active, as the formless as also the one capable of having all kinds of forms, as the Power (Śakti) as also the possessor of the Power (Śaktimat). Meditation on or worship of God in some of His particular forms as God or the Goddess is a special religious attitude, which slightly and congenially tinges the supreme divine realization without disturbing its purity and tranquillity in any way.

Complete surrender to the will of God, to the power of God, was the watchword of the Mother worship practised by Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa. The whole spirit is nicely embodied in a saying attributed to the great saint, "Don't go on saying *āmār, āmār, āmār* (this is mine), for the *ā* in the word is the root-cause of all disturbances; it is the *upasarga* (literally, a prefix that changes the meanings of words; hence an obnoxious addition); cast it off and then go on saying *mār*, *mār*, *mār* (Mother's), that is, everything belongs to the Mother and to none else. This complete surrender to the Mother brought about with it a realization of unity—a

unity not only with all men, but with all the beings, as children of the same universal Mother, or individual sparks from the same dynamo. This has added a great humanitarian tone to the religion preached by Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa, where service to humanity has been recognized as the best form of worshipping the Mother.

Complete surrender to the will and power of God is the watchword of the Mother worship emphasized also by Śrī Aurobindo. By his lifelong spiritual practice he brought out the deep significance of the Tāntrika *sādhanā* of Śakti and propounded it anew from his own philosophical point of view of the Descent of the Divine. About this surrender to the Mother he said, "There must be a total and sincere surrender; there must be an exclusive self-opening to the divine Power; there must be a constant and integral choice of the Truth that is descending, a constant and integral rejection of the falsehood of the mental, vital and physical Powers and Appearances that still rule the earth-Nature.

"The surrender must be total and seize all the parts of the being. It is not enough that the psychic should respond and the higher mental accept or even the inner vital submit and the inner physical consciousness feel the influence. There must be in no part of the being, even the most external, anything that makes a reserve, anything that hides behind doubts, confusions and

subterfuges, anything that revolts or refuses."[1] And "In proportion as the surrender and self-consecration progress the Sadhaka becomes conscious of the Divine Shakti doing the Sadhana, pouring into him more and more of herself, founding in him the freedom and perfection of the Divine Nature."[2]

Again it has been said, "All your life must be an offering and a sacrifice to the Supreme; your only object in action shall be to serve, to receive, to fulfil, to become a manifesting instrument of the Divine Shakti in her works. You must grow in the divine consciousness till there is no difference between your will and hers, no motive except her impulsion in you, no action that is not her conscious action in you and through you."[3]

This sacrifice of the individual to the Supreme may not be possible all at once—it may proceed in three gradual stages. "Until you are capable of this complete dynamic identification, you have to regard yourself as a soul and body created for her service, one who does all for her sake."[4] "There must be no demand for fruit and no seeking for reward: the only fruit for you is the pleasure of the Divine Mother and the fulfilment of her work, your only reward a constant progression in divine consciousness and calm and

1 *The Mother*, pp. 3-4.
2 *Ibid*, p. 13.
3 *Ibid*, pp. 27-8.
4 *Ibid*, p. 28.

strength and bliss."[1] In the second stage a time soon comes when the *sādhaka* will feel more and more that he is the instrument and not the worker. "And afterwards you will realize that the divine Shakti not only inspires and guides, but initiates and carries out your works; all your movements are originated by her, all your powers are hers, mind, life and body are conscious and joyful instruments of her action, means for her play, moulds for her manifestation in the physical universe."[2] "The last stage of this perfection will come when you are completely identified with the Divine Mother and feel yourself to be no longer another and separate being, instrument, servant or worker, but truly a child and eternal portion of her consciousness and force. Always she will be in you and you in her; it will be your constant, simple and natural experience that all your thought and seeing and action, your very breathing or moving come from her and are hers. You will know and see and feel that you are a person and power formed by her out of herself, put out from her for the play and yet always safe in her, being of her being, consciousness of her consciousness, force of her force, ananda of her Ananda."[3]

Herein is revealed the true significance of Mother worship in India.

1 *The Mother*, pp. 28-9.
2 *Ibid*, p. 30.
3 *Ibid*, pp. 32-3.

5. Conclusion

A few words before we conclude. They are on the human mother. If it be a fact, as the modern trend is to believe, that it is the human mother who has given rise to the Divine Mother, it has to be admitted on the other side that the Divine Mother in her turn, or in return, has added majesty and glory to the human mother. It may be said to be an ingrained belief in the mind of an average cultured Indian that the human mother is an incarnation, a descent in condescension, of the Divine Mother. The Indian belief in this respect has been nicely given expression to by a Bengalee poet who says that as the infinite sky above is reflected even in the water that is deposited in the hole made on the way by a cow's hoof, so also the great divine Mother reflects herself in any and every mother on earth. This explains the general Indian tendency towards the deification of the mother in the social, and even in the domestic life. Not only the mother, but women, as a class, are regarded as the incarnation of the Devī. Even when she is not a mother, but an unmarried girl of tender age, she is the Devī as Kanyā-Kumārī; when she fulfils the duties of a religious vow to have a husband of her liking, she is Umā carrying on penance to win Śiva as her husband. The prevalence of this religious belief has exerted a tremendous influence on the evolution of the moral consciousness of the whole

Indian nation. Mother worship influenced even the patriotic sentiment of the Indians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Great Mother is the Earth-goddess and as such is identified with the mother country. This will explain the blending of the religious sentiment with the patriotic, and so far as Bengal of the nineteenth century is concerned, the political consciousness of the people was deeply blended with the religious consciousness, and the national hymn composed by Baṅkim Candra, "Hail to thee, my Mother" (*Vande Mātaram*), is a clear index to the pervasion of the political by the religious sentiment.

The Conception of Puruṣottama in Indian Philosophy and Religion

Scholars and philosophers still differ as to whether the idea of a unified Being, as the in-dwelling reality of the manifested diversity, is found in the hymns of the Vedas. The general trend is to maintain that the period of the Vedas was predominantly one of deifying the forces of nature as gods for whom reverence and oblations were due. It has, nevertheless, been admitted that some of the gods, like Indra, Viṣṇu, and Varuṇa, are depicted in places as wielding sovereign power over the universe, indicating thereby the idea of a sovereign power working behind the universal process. Some, of course, hold that, apart from these descriptions of some of the gods as sovereign deities, there are hymns in the Vedas which give clear indication of the idea of a Being underlying the whole universe as the ultimate Reality, and that the Upaniṣadic idea of a unified Brahman is a development from the Vedic idea of the Being.

Special mention may be made in this connection of the well-known *Puruṣa-sūkta* (hymn to the Puruṣa) of the *Ṛg-Veda* (X. 90). Even admitting the fact, as has been pointed out by some scholars, that an analysis of the language of the hymn indicates that it was probably composed in a compara-

tively later period—a surmise which is corroborated by the fact that the hymn speaks of the three divisions of the Vedas into *Ṛk*, *Sāman*, and *Yajus*, and also of the fourfold division of caste, viz. Brāhmaṇa, Rājanya (Kṣatriya), Vaiśya, and Śūdra—it cannot be doubted that the hymn is pre-Upaniṣadic, and it was recognized to be so in later scriptures and by well-known commentators.

In this hymn, the Puruṣa has been described as having a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, and a thousand legs; He pervades the whole universe and yet transcends it by a few inches (*sa bhūmiṃ viśvato vṛtvā atyatiṣṭhad-daśāṅgulam*). The Puruṣa is all that has been and all that is to be; He is the lord of immortality and is independent of material nutriment. This universe speaks of His greatness, but He is greater than that; the universe represents only one-fourth of Him, three-fourths of Him being immortal in heaven. It is noteworthy that, in this *Puruṣa-sūkta* of the *Ṛg-Veda*, we find an indication of the well-known Upaniṣadic interpretation of sacrifice as a process of contemplation on the real nature of the universe. That is hinted in a verse where it is said that the gods performed and spread the sacrifice (*yajñam atanvata*) with the Puruṣa as the oblation, where the spring was the oil, summer the fuel, and autumn the libation. The implication seems to be that the cosmic process is nothing but a process of sacrifice, where the one ultimate Being is con-

tinuously sacrificing Himself in manifesting through an infinite diversity of forms and forces.

This Purusa has been variously spoken of in the Upaniṣads. It has been said in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* that the objects are superior to the senses, and the mind is superior to the objects; to the mind, intellect is the next higher principle, and the great soul residing in every individual is higher still; the unmanifested Potency or cosmic One (*avyakta*) is higher than the great soul, but the Puruṣa or the Being is superior even to that; there is nothing beyond the Puruṣa, that is the highest support, the ultimate destination. This Puruṣa has been described as the supreme Being (*puruṣaṃ mahāntam*), of the colour of the sun and dazzling beyond all darkness. That Puruṣa, made of light and ambrosial delight, who is the indwelling principle in the world outside as well as within the body, is the ultimate truth, the Brahman. He is all that is and is not.

Descriptions of this type abound in the Upaniṣads. But the question is, What exactly is the nature of this Puruṣa? The word *puruṣa* has been interpreted by the grammarians and the commentators mainly in two ways: first, derived from the root '*pṛ*' (to fill up), the word is taken in the sense of that which fills up either the universe or the individual as the ultimate indwelling principle; secondly, the word has also been associated with the word *pura* (a city or an abode) and the

root *śī* (to lie), and this derivation also yields practically the same meaning as before, *i.e.* the ultimate principle that lies or dwells in everything.

The question is, Is this Puruṣa of the Upaniṣads a personal God or not? It may be pointed out in this connection that, in the Saṃhitās and the Upaniṣads, we find the Purusa described in some places as having head, eyes, ears, and feet, indicating thereby that, in speaking of the Puruṣa, the ancient seers had, at least, a vague sense of a person. But these descriptions of the Puruṣa may be, and have actually been, interpreted otherwise, the description of head, eyes, ears, and feet being taken in the figurative sense. The main controversy on the point arises if the conception of a unified Being found in the Upaniṣads, whether it is described as the Brahman, or the Soul, or the supreme Soul (Paramātman), or the Puruṣa, signifies a personal God, by which we should mean an absolute, self-existent, self-conscious, self-distinguishing, and self-controlling power, shaping the universe to its eternal ideal by evolving and co-ordinating all finite things within itself—a power releasing all its creative energy with a definite purpose and plan leading to the complete realization of its own infinite nature.

There are, indeed, verses and passages in the Upaniṣads which may be interpreted as pointing

to the personal character of God. Thus, for instance, it may be held that the Upaniṣadic God must have been a self-conscious principle, for it has been said that the creative process proceeds from His seeing Himself (*īkṣaṇa*); or in other words, His self-consciousness precedes His self-activity. The purposive character of the world-activity is indicated by the fact that the laws of nature have repeatedly been explained in the Upaniṣads as the decrees of the divine will. The ultimate Reality has repeatedly been described as the inner controller (*antaryāmin*) not only of the external world, but also of the individual soul. He is said to have been doing, in and through the individual and the collective society, as well as for the individual, and the collective society, just what is the best. But, as there are verses and passages in the Upaniṣads indicating the conception of a personal God, there are many more to prove the contrary, and even these verses and passages, indicative of a personal God, have been interpreted in a different way by a large number of philosophers and commentators, who would stoutly resist the attempt at making the Upaniṣadic Brahman a personal Reality.

It is generally held that the controversy, whether the Upaniṣadic Brahman is a personal God or an impersonal and unqualified Reality, is a later development in the history of Indian religious thought, say, from the sixteenth cen-

tury onwards, when the non-dualistic Vedāntic schools and the devotional schools leaning towards various sorts of dualism began to indulge in mutual antagonism. But this view does not seem to be historically sound, in consideration of the volume and character of the later controversy. It seems that the opposite trends existed long before, and attempts to solve the vital issue not by trying to explain away the differences, but by a happy synthesis were also made long before. Thus the idea of Puruṣottama or the supreme Being evolved as the best proposition to synthesise the opposite trends. This idea of Puruṣottama as a definite philosophic concept is first expounded in the *Gītā;* and, as we shall presently see, it had its various modifications in later days.

It must have been noticed by all students of Indian philosophy and religion that the *Bhagavad-Gītā* occupies a unique place in our national life and thought because of a distinctive character of its own. Whoever might have been its author, either God Himself in His incarnation as Kṛṣṇa, or some intellectual giant with deep religious insight derived from personal realization, the *Gītā* is a grand attempt at synthesizing the then extant philosophical systems and religious trends of India in a bold ideal of integrality, which does ample justice both to divinity and humanity.

The integral ideal of Puruṣottama, as we find

it in the *Gītā*, presupposes a background where the Sāṃkhya philosophy and another extreme trend of metaphysical abstraction seem to have had important roles. The Sāmkhya philosophy, at least in the early phase of it, presents a dualism where the Puruṣa or the conscious entity, and the Prakṛti, the gross nature of change and transformation, are expounded as two mutually exclusive entities, both eternally self-existent. The union of the Purusa and the Prakṛti is accidental, and they work jointly like the blind man and the lame man (when the former carries the latter on his shoulders) without any mutation of their respective ultimate nature. In the phenomenal process involving the mind and matter, there is, on the one hand, the temporal reflection of the consciousness of the Purusa in the effulgent-stuff of the Prakṛti, while there is, on the other hand, the false attribution of the qualities of the Prakṛti to the Puruṣa. But this thin thread of accidence behind the whole phenomenal process could not satisfy the philosophic queries of a large number of people, and this stood in the way of the Sāṃkhya system being widely accepted in its original form.

To avoid the difficulty, there came later modifications, the most important phase of which is to hold that, even maintaining her separate entity, the Prakṛti works not by freaks and pranks, but in an order ultimately to satisfy the Puruṣa. This

naturally brings in the question of teleology without making nature an ultimate play of some supreme conscious agent. To ascribe motive to purely blind nature is illogical; to ascribe agency to the Puruṣa is practically to give up the fundamental position of the Sāṃkhya itself.

The *Gītā* had to offer a solution in this respect. Turning to the trend of metaphysical abstraction, we find that it reduces the ultimate Reality to an unprefixed 'X', whose immutability becomes incompatible with its direct relation with the mutable world of matter, life, and the mind. This necessitated some sort of a theory of illusion, where illusion assumes the form of a principle which is neither real nor unreal, and which is neither involved in the very nature of the ultimate Being, nor anything outside Its nature. We cannot ascribe mutability directly to the immutable; the theory of illusion is therefore an attempt at connecting the two in an indirect manner. The *Gītā* offers a solution even in this respect. Further, there was the antagonism between the Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā, with its exclusive stress on work (*karma*), and the Uttara-Mīmāṃsā, with its exclusive stress on knowledge (*jñāna*). Direct and indirect references to this antagonism are to be found in many contexts in the *Gītā*, and the *Gītā* is pledged to a happy reconciliation between *karma* and *jñāna*.

The idea of Puruṣottama, as we find it ex-

pounded in the *Gītō*, must be understood against the background discussed above. Let us, first of all, see how the idea is presented in the *Gītā*. The *Gītā* speaks of two Puruṣas, the one is the *kṣara* (mutable), and the other is the *aksara* (immutable); of the two, the *kṣara* is represented by all the beings (*sarvāṇi bhūtāni*), and the *akṣara* is represented by the absolutely immutable one. The highest Being or the supreme Being (*uttamaḥ puruṣah*) is different from the two Purusas spoken above. He is the supreme Soul (Paramātman) who, in His all-comprehensive nature, absorbs within Himself both mutability and immutability, and, as such, though changeless (*avyaya*), He, as the sovereign power (*Īśvara*), permeates and preserves all the three worlds. 'As I transcend the nature of the *kṣara* and, at the same time, represent a higher principle than the *akṣara* also, I am well known in the scriptures and among the people as the Puruṣottama' (XV. 18).

Here it has to be noted that the *Gītā* describes both the *kṣara* and the *akṣara* as Puruṣas. The emphasis of the *Gītā* seems to be on the fact that neither of the two principles, the *kṣara* and the *akṣara*, represents the whole of the Truth; they are but two aspects of the same reality. They may be contradictory to each other, but contradictions may cohere in a higher principle, which may absorb them both. In studying the *Gītā*, we must note one cardinal fact that the *Gītā* empha-

sizes repeatedly that, to know or rather to realize the Truth, we must know the whole of it; contradictions and controversies arise only when we take a partial view of the Truth. The idea of the Puruṣottama represents an all-absorbing wholeness, comprising within it all the diametrically opposite poles. As a matter of fact, in some of the Purāṇas and in later Vaiṣṇava philosophy (particularly of Bengal), the Puruṣottama has been defined as the supreme divine Person Who has the inherent power of absorbing all sorts of contradictions.

In connection with the idea of the Puruṣottama, the conception of the *kṣara* Puruṣa and the *akṣara* Brahman as we find them more popularly described have afforded great scope for difference of opinion among later thinkers. But, instead of dealing with these controversial interpretations, we should first turn our attention to the background against which, as we have explained, the idea of the Puruṣottama thrived. The duality in the Sāṃkhya theory of the Puruṣa and the Prakṛti as absolutely separate principles had to be synthesized, the disquieting chasm between the Reality and the appearance had to be bridged, and the seeming antagonism between knowledge and work (*jñāna* and *karma*) had to be reconciled.

The *kṣara*, in this context, may first be taken to represent the blind Prakṛti of the Sāṃkhya,

whose nature is to change, and the unqualified Puruṣa, as the fully, purely conscious principle, represents the *akṣara.* They may be taken to be independent principles in relation to each other—the one excluding the other in its nature, but both of them representing two aspects of the nature of the supreme Person, in whom both have their ultimate support, and by whom both are controlled in their union as also in separation.

The principles of the Prakṛti and the Puruṣa of the Sāṃkhya have been explained in the *Gītā* as the *kṣetra* (field) and the *kṣetrajña* (knower of the field). If the *ksetra* means the field created by the blind forces of nature, the *kṣetrajña* means the conscious principle which is working through the medium of nature. If the Prakṛti means the physical body, the Puruṣa means the Spirit residing within it and working with its help at every step. What are these principles of matter and mind, body and spirit, in their true nature? They are nothing but the two aspects in which the divine energy works. The whole of the Divinity or the supreme Person is the possessor of this energy which works in two different ways; we say works, for, in the static or negative aspect of the energy, there is as much work as is in the dynamic or the positive aspect of it.

If the Prakṛti and the Puruṣa of the Sāṃkhya be viewed in this light, there will be no difficulty in explaining the teleology even in the working of

blind nature, and also in explaining why the Prakṛti should at all work for the satisfaction of the Puruṣa and why the two should unite and separate. The mystery has to be fathomed not in reference to the two. but in reference to the One, the Puruṣottama.

As for the chasm between appearance and Reality, the *Gītā* would again ask us to widen our perspective and to hold the two integrated in the truth of the supreme Person. The appearance, the world of mutability, represents as much of the supreme Being as does the unqualified formless Reality. It is no mistake to describe the Brahman or the great One as formless, unqualified, inactive, and incomprehensible; but we must not forget that that is merely one aspect of viewing the Truth, but not the only aspect. He who expands also contracts; to be viewed as infinitely contracted is one pole of the Truth, the other pole being an infinite expansion in manifestation. Indeed, there is Māyā, a mysterious and an inscrutable power, working between the two; there may be logical difficulty in associating this Māyā with the *akṣara* Brahman of the Vedāntins, but there is no difficulty in associating it with the supreme Being, in association with whom Māyā discards her unreal and illusory nature and becomes *yoga-māyā*, the mysterious power and will of the supreme Being.

Śaṅkara, in commenting on the *Gītā*, explains *kṣara* as the illusory appearance (*vikāra*. or

vivarta) of all things and beings limited by names and forms; it is the *aśvattha* tree (*aśvattha*, that which does not last even till tomorrow). *Akṣara*, according to him, may refer to Māyā, the principle of nescience, which is called *kūṭastha*, because of its extremely crooked, cunning nature in deluding all by its various tricks and tactics; it is the seed of the world-process, the *aśvattha* tree, to use the same simile. Māyā is called immutable, because of the fact that the illusory forms it creates change, but itself, as the root-cause of all these effects, never changes. That which is other than all the effects, on the one hand, and other than the root-cause of all these effects, on the other hand, is the ultimate Reality, the Brahman, called poetically, or emotionally, as Śaṅkara would say, the Puruṣottama. But this interpretation ignores one cardinal fact—the fact that the *kṣara* and the *akṣara* both have been said to be the Puruṣa, part or aspect of the supreme Being. To ignore this is to ignore the keynote of the *Gītā* itself.

Again, the antagonism between the advocates of *karma* (work) and *jñāna* (knowledge) can also be best reconciled with reference to this conception of the Puruṣottama. *Karma* and *jñāna* can naturally be taken as representing the positive and negative aspects in which the Reality works —generally called *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*. *Pravṛtti* leads to a process of change and, as such, it is the

kṣara aspect of the Reality; and *nivṛtti*, which leads to cessation and final immutability, may be taken to represent the *akṣara*.

The two are contradictory to each other only when we have a partial conception of the Reality; but in the integral ideal of the Truth, *i.e.* in the truth of the Purusottama, the contradictories become complementaries, when the path of *karma* must be resorted to with knowledge as the element of constant purification, and the knowledge of the highest Truth must be utilized in the service of all beings. This has been explained in the *Gītā* as the best form of sacrifice.

Though the idea of the Puruṣottama as a definite philosophic concept is first found in the *Gītā*, it is not that no indication of the idea is found in the earlier scriptures. In the Vedic *Puruṣa-sūkta*, referred to before, we notice that two aspects of Puruṣa have been hinted, one the immanent and the other the transcendent, when it is said that the Puruṣa pervades the whole universe and yet transcends it by a few inches.

In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (II. 3. 1), we hear of two aspects of the Brahman, the manifested (*mūrta*) and the unmanifested (*amūrta*), the mortal (*martya*) and the immortal (*amṛta*), the static (*sthita*) and the dynamic (*yat*), the existent (*sat*) and the undetermined (*tat*), though the idea of a still higher principle absorbing the two is not there. That the supreme Truth has two

aspects, the dynamic and the static, the immanent and the transcendent, is also hinted at in other Upaniṣads, for instance, when it is said in the *Īśa Upaniṣad*, 'It moves; it does not. It is far off and, at the same time, very near. It dwells within all these, but yet it remains outside all these' (5). The idea that the nature of the supreme Truth must be such as may synthesize all the contradictions is clearly indicated in verses of this type.

The use of the phrase 'Uttama Puruṣa' is found in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (VIII. 12. 3), where it has been said that, when the soul with all satisfaction emerges out of this body in its supreme luminous form, it is called the Uttama Puruṣa. Here, of course, it seems from the context that the Uttama Purusa refers to the individual soul, and not to the Paramātman. But an anticipation of the idea of the Puruṣottama, as we find it in the *Gītā*, is noticeable in some of the verses of the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (I. 2-3). It has been said that time, nature, fate, accident, matter, consciousness etc., which come within the category of the *kṣara*, cannot be the ultimate cause of the world, for their aggregate is not possible without the soul; but even the individual soul, which comes under the category of the *akṣara*, cannot be the ultimate cause, as that itself comes under the sway of sorrow and joy. It has been realized by the seers, in their deep meditation,

that a supreme Being discharges His power, which regulates both the soul and the temporal process. Again, it is said that the Lord (*Īśa*) holds and controls the whole of the universe comprising the mutable (*kṣara*) and the immutable (*akṣara*), the manifested (*vyakta*) and the unmanifested (*avyakta*) (I. 8). It is more explicitly said in another verse (I. 10), where the Prakṛti (or Pradhāna as Prakṛti is often styled) is called the *kṣara*, and Hara (He who removes all ignorance and afflictions) as the immortal and immutable principle, while the supreme One lords it over them both (*kṣaraṃ pradhānam amṛtākṣaraṃ haraḥ kṣarātmānāvīśate deva ekah*).

But, as we all know, all the Upaniṣads were like the cow, as it were, which was milked by the cowherd Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and the *Gītā* was the milk. There may be anticipation of the idea of the Puruṣottama in the Upaniṣads, but the full-fledged concept is to be found first in the *Gītā*. The lead given by the *Gītā* in this respect was followed by the Purāṇic literature, where we find a popular modification of the Sāṃkhya view and the Vedāntic view in the light of the idea of the Puruṣottama.

In the Purānas we seldom find the Prakṛti and the Puruṣa described independently of the highest Being, of whom the two have generally been explained as attributes. Again, Brahman and Māyā of the Vedānta occupy the same posi-

tion in the Purāṇas, with relation to the highest Being, as the Puruṣa and the Prakṛti of the Sāṃkhya. With these, again, there has been an amalgamation of the idea of Śiva-Śakti of the Tantras, of which we shall presently speak at some length.

The post-*Gītā* Vaiṣṇava sects naturally found in the idea of the Puruṣottama a fulfilment of their emotional approach. As believers in a personal God, who is conceived of as having a body of perfectly pure spiritual stuff and indulging eternally in sports, they caught at the idea of the Puruṣottama with all eagerness and vehemence, and, with their back to the wall, tried their best to assail the Vedāntic stand of the unqualified, inactive, and formless Brahman and the theory of the falsity of Māyā. The Bengal school of Vaiṣṇavas laid exclusive stress on the conception of divine sports (*līlā*), and so the advocacy for a personal God endowed with supreme power of infinite categories has been the strongest in their theology. Following a verse of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the Bengal Vaiṣṇavas speak of three distinct aspects in which the Reality can be conceived, viz. as the Brahman, as the Bhagavat, and as the Paramātman.

According to them, the supreme Being enjoys Himself in His sports with the help of His powers; the Bhagavat is the perfect Being, as there is the full play of the powers in Him, while the Brah-

man is in the lowest scale, as this aspect of the Reality is absolutely bereft of the play of the powers. The stage of the Paramātman is ranked middle, as in this stage the Being is associated with two categories of powers, viz. the power to create and control the individual (*jīva-śakti*) and the power to create and control the material world (*māyā-śakti*). The Bhagavat is the Puruṣottama and, as such, He is the ultimate support (*pratiṣṭhā*) also of the *akṣara* Brahman, by which the Bengal Vaiṣṇavas meant the Brahman as conceived by the Vedāntins. They repeatedly refer to a saying of the *Gītā*, where Śrī Kṛṣṇa as the Puruṣottama asserted. 'I am the ultimate support also of the Brahman (*brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhā'ham*)'.

The word *pratiṣṭhā*, in this context, has been explained as *pratimā*, which means solidified form. When we say that the sun is the *pratiṣṭhā* or *pratimā* of light, what is meant is that the sun is the solidified form of light. Exactly in the same way, when it is said that the supreme Being is the *pratiṣṭhā* of the Brahman, what is meant is that the supreme Being is the solidified form of the Brahman. It has sometimes been said that the word 'Brahman' is an adjective to qualify the supreme Being, to denote the infinity of His qualities. In this interpretation, the Bengal Vaiṣṇavas have the support of some of the important Purāṇas.

Akṣaro Brahman has also been conceived by the Vaiṣṇava thinkers as the abode (*dhāman*) of the supreme Being. The *dhāman*, according to them, is not something outside the nature of the Lord; it is a particular way of expansion of the very nature of the Lord. The supreme Being is described as possessing a particular kind of power (*sandhinī*) which sustains His very existence. With the help of this special kind of power, the Lord expands that aspect of His nature which is pure existence, and this expansion of His nature as pure existence is really what is meant by His *dhāman*. The Vedāntins conceive the ultimate Reality as pure existence; they therefore have just a glimpse of the *dhāman* of the Lord, but not of the Lord who resides within and enjoys His eternal love-dalliances.

As we have hinted, this idea of the supreme Being had its development in another sphere of Indian religious thought: we mean the Tantras. Three distinct ways of comprehending the well-known Tāntric theory of Śiva-Śakti can be marked. One view will hold Śiva as the supreme Being, who is the possessor of Śakti—the source and support of Śakti, though, of course, it will admit that Śiva can never be conceived without his association with Śakti, as in that case he becomes reduced to nothingness. The other view will give prominence to Śakti who is the ultimate Reality, Śiva being considered the best principle

through which Śakti has the highest reflection. There is, again, a third view, according to which neither Śiva nor Śakti is considered the highest Truth, but they are the two aspects of a higher principle, the supreme Being.

In this connection, we may refer to the conception of the Paramaśiva, in relation to Śiva and Śakti, as we find it propounded in Kaśmīr Śaivism. The Paramaśiva, as the highest Being, is of the nature of perfect bliss and is complete in Himself, being absolutely without any want. He holds in Himself the unmanifested universe as an idea, rather an experience of His own. 'But in order that there may be a universe, He brings into operation that aspect of His Śakti which manifests itself as the principle of negation and lets the ideal universe disappear from His view and allows Himself, as it were, to feel the want of a universe, but for which feeling there could be, as said above, no need of a manifested universe on the part of one who is all-complete in Himself. In this state, He is what He was as Pramaśiva in all essentials and in every respect, with only the elimination of the experience of the ideal universe, which Paramaśiva, in His aspect as pervading the universe—as distinguished from the transcending aspect—feels as one and identical with Himself' (J. C. Chatterji, *Kashmir Shaivaism*, 1914, p. 62). This negative state of the Paramaśiva is Śiva, who is described as of the

essence of pure knowledge without having any sort of activity. This conception of Śiva may very well be likened to the conception of the *akṣara* Puruṣa, while Śakti, as the positive principle of world-activity, may be likened to the conception of the *kṣara* Puruṣa. Here Paramaśiva becomes another name for the Puruṣottama.

We have to remember that the idea of the Puruṣottama in the *Gītā* received added significance in association with the personality of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who combined in himself a double personality, one divine and the other human. The Puruṣottama is perfection itself, because not only there is the synthesis of the immanent and the transcendent, or the mutable and the immutable, or matter and mind in the philosophical sense, but in Śrī Kṛṣṇa there is a concrete personality, where there is no line of demarcation between the perfect divinity and perfect humanity—the abstract ideal of perfection finds its expression here in flesh and blood. The perfect being must be perfect in every respect ; Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the Puruṣottama not because he is perfect in his supra-natural abode of Vṛndāvana, *i.e.* his own self, but because he is as perfect in his incarnation as an historical man in the land of geographical Vṛndāvana. This truth is hinted at in a verse of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (X. 43.17), where it has been said that, when Śrī Kṛṣṇa stepped on the raised platform to kill the demon Kaṃsa in the duel, he appeared

to all the wrestlers like the thunder embodied; to all men, as the best of men; and to all women, as beauty and love personified. To the cowherds, he was the most intimate one; the chastiser to all the wicked kings; the darling to his father. He appeared like death to the king of the Bhoja (Kaṃsa), an incomprehensibly great one to the ordinary man, but *yogins* knew him to be the supreme Truth, while he was just a kinsman to his own folk, the Vṛṣṇis.

The idea of the Puruṣottama as the all-embracing perfect Being was a source of inspiration also to the great sage Śrī Aurobindo, who made much use of it in expounding his philosophy of integral *yoga*. Commenting on the exposition of the Puruṣottama in the *Gītā*, he says, 'This utmost undividing monism sees the one as the one even in the multiplicities of nature, in all aspects, as much in the reality of self and of cosmos as in that greatest reality of the supracosmic which is the source of self and the truth of the cosmos and is not bound either by any affirmation of universal becoming or by any universal or absolute negation' (*Essays on the Gītā*, 1928, XV. pp. 280-81).

THE INDIAN CONCEPTION OF THE DIVINE BODY

The idea of divinity has its origin in our higher value-sense ; and it is generally seen that our spiritual value-sense leads us to a path of abstraction and of negation. The process of abstraction leads us to a conception of the Godhead as the unprefixed ' x ', whose justification is more logical than psychological, and the process of negation leads us to believe that truth is essentially transcendental and as such has nothing to do with the cosmic process which proceeds from an incorrigible principle of nescience. But in India, with this trend of abstract and negative thinking, there is another dominant trend of positive thinking where divinity is found to be embodied. Here arises the question of the conception of a divine body as opposed to the terrestrial body—the body of matter, death, decay. This Indian conception of the divine body may be looked at from two points of view, either as a concrete body of spiritual substance possessed by the Divinity, or as a perfectly transubstantiated spiritual body possessed by the divinized perfect man. Let us discuss them separately with reference to particular systems of Indian thought.

Vaiṣṇavism in India was never satisfied with a God of metaphysical abstraction. God, with the

Vaiṣṇavas, is the embodiment of perfect love and of beauty not only figuratively, but literally. The Lord in His divine abode eternally enjoys His Divine sport in a divine body which is *real*. What is the secret of this divine body of the Lord ? Of what is it made, and what are its components ? It may be said in reply that the body of the Lord is identical with the essence of the Lord. We must not think in the human analogy that there are the body of the Lord and a possessor of that body—a *deha* and a *dehin* ; in this case the body and the possessor of the body are identical, and as there is no possibility of a distinction of any sort between the form of the Lord and His essence, there is no internal differentiation (*svagata-bheda*) of any sort in the supreme Lord. The essence of the Lord includes three attributes, namely, *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda*—existence, consciousness, and bliss ; the body of the Lord also includes just the same attributes. In the scriptures, the Lord is often found described as a perfect Person and is spoken of, for example, as *cid-ghana*, *ānanda-ghana*, *rasa-ghana*. The word ghana in this context suggests compactness or solidity ; the body of the Lord is then consciousness and bliss solidified in an immutable image, the *mūrti*. As the Lord in His pure essence remains in the *aprākṛta dhāman*—that is, the supranatural abode, there cannot be any touch of gross sensuous elements in His body ; the effulgent material of which His

body—and not only His body, but even the region where He resides in His pure being—is composed, is called *viśuddha-sattva* which is a pure spiritual substance.

It has been said that the power by which the Lord exists (*sandhinī śakti*) has a special purpose of self-manifestation; *viśuddha-sattva* may be described as the 'substantial form' of that special purpose of that particular power of God that sustains His very existence. As the body and essence of the Lord are identical, and as He is *sac-cid-ānanda-vigraha* (transfiguration of all existence, consciousness, and bliss) both in body and in soul, there cannot be any distinction between the various parts of His body, and no limb or sense-organ can have any special work; every part of His body possesses the power that all the sense-organs can have (cf. *aṅgāni yasya sakalendriya-vṛttimanti*). In the scriptures, we find Him described both as possessing an organ and as not possessing it; both descriptions are correct because He does not possess the human organs of senses, but He possesses a divine or non-natural form of them. When the scriptures speak of His body resembling that of the human being, the similarity must relate to form only, but not to ingredients.

All these may sound to our modern scientific or philosophic mind as mere theological fabrications in response to the anthropomorphic urges of

our mind. Without entering into a detailed study of the standpoint of the Vaiṣṇavas on this belief in the divine body, what we are particularly interested in noting is that in the province of Vaiṣṇavism there was the idea of a *spiritual substance* as opposed to the *material substance*. The *viśuddha-sattva* of the Vaiṣṇavas, of which the *dhāman* (abode) and *vigraha* (body) of the Lord are composed, is an element as is *aśuddha-sattva* (non-purified intelligence belonging to mundane nature); but the fundamental distinction is that the one is a spiritual element whereas the other is gross.

Further there is an implied idea of the gross being transformed into the spiritual. The Vaiṣṇavas, particularly the Bengal Vaiṣṇavas, believe that a devotee can, by dint of his continual religious endeavours—by his one-pointed devotion—cast off the gross impurities of his body and mind (figuratively described as crossing the river *virajā*, where *virajā* means bereft of all impurities) and enter the *dhāman* of the Lord, and there enjoy the dalliances of the Lord eternally as an attendant (*parikara*); the devotee thus allowed to enter the region of the Lord as an attendant must enter it with a body, and that body cannot but be a divinized body.

In the province of Buddhism, particularly in Mahāyāna Buddhism, we have the well-known theory of *tri-kāya*, or the three bodies of the

Buddha, namely, *dharma-kāya*, commonly known as the body of law; *sambhoga-kāya*, the body of bliss; and *nirmāṇa-kāya*, the body of transformation. Avoiding all the controversies, it may be said that the *tri-kāya* theory in Mahāyāna developed with the belief that a godly man must not possess a body of the same substance and quality as an ordinary man of flesh and blood. After the Buddha's death, his personality soon became hallowed, naturally, a large section of his followers were not content to confine his extraordinary personality to a particular historical existence; popular psychology demanded a subtler and more glorified existence for the Lord beyond the mortal frame. So a belief grew as early as Pali Buddhism that the Lord had a double existence, the *rūpa-kāya*, the gross physical existence, and the *dharma-kāya*, existence in the eternal and all-pervading body of law. In later times, this *rūpa-kāya* was further subdivided as the *nirmāṇa-kāya*, the gross body of transformation, and *sambhoga-kāya*, a subtle refulgent body of bliss. In earlier Buddhism, this *tri-kāya* theory represented primarily a Buddhalogy which may be explained in the following manner. The *dharma-kāya* of the Buddha represents the quintessence of the Buddha as pure enlightenment or perfect wisdom, a perfect knowledge of the law, which is the absolute truth; it is the *samādhi-kāya* of the Buddha, or the Buddha in *nirvāṇa*. But before he merges into *nir-*

vāṇa, he possesses and enjoys, for his own sake and for others' welfare, the fruit of his charitable behaviour as a Bodhisattva, and this is the body of enjoyment, or the beatific body. Human Buddhas, who are like illusory phantoms and are created through magical contrivances, represent the *nirmāṇa-kāya*, the body in creation.

When this Buddhalogy began to develop cosmological, and even ontological, significance, *dharma-kāya* was conceived something like the undifferentiated and unqualified Brahman of the Upaniṣads; it is the eternal and immutable one underlying the diversity of things, it is the 'thatness' (*tathatā-rūpa*) underlying what is and is not, the cosmic one, the ultimate reality, the void, the uncharacterized all-pervading pure consciousness of the Mahāyānists. *Nirmāṇa-kāya*, on the other hand, represents the gross physical existence. Here, we have to concentrate on the conception of the beatific body, which is neither a state of formless existence nor a state of material existence. It is a body indeed with all the implications of a body, but it is a body of bliss and of light. It is a very subtle body which manifests itself in the various conditions of bliss in superhuman beings for preaching the noble truths. It is 'an exceedingly refulgent body, from every pore of which streamed forth countless brilliant rays of light, illuminating the *lokadhātus* as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges. When this body stretched

out its tongue, innumerable rays of light issued forth from it, and on each ray of light was found a lotus of thousand petals on which was seated a Tathāgata-vigraha, (an image of the Tathāgata, a sort of *nirmāṇa-kāya*), preaching to Bodhisattvas, Gṛhasthas (householders), Pravrajitas (recluses), and others the *dharma* consisting of the six *pāramitās*'.[1]

This belief in a subtle body of light and bliss becomes deeply significant in relation to the general Mahāyānic idea of Bodhisattvahood. Leaving aside the traditional mystery that hangs round the figures of the Bodhisattvas, described in the popular Mahāyānic texts, Bodhisattvas may be taken to be highly advanced personalities who have, through long processes of discipline and of meditation, replaced the impurities of their physical form by light and bliss. It has been said that these Bodhisattvas first qualify for the attainment of perfect enlightenment and absolute tranquillity through the absolute cessation of the existential series ; but when they consider themselves fully qualified for the attainment of such a state, they postpone it through a strong resolution and keep themselves actively alive in this world in order to serve humanity and all beings by helping them in their final deliverance through the attainment of perfect enlightenment.

1 Dr. N. Dutt, *Aspects of Mahāyāna Buddhism and its Relation to Hīnayāna*, p. 118.

It is seen therefore that a Bodhisattva lives and moves and has his being in this world of phenomenal existence, yet he is never touched by the principles of defilement that may bind him to the world of miseries. This indicates a separate existence, a separate body, for the Bodhisattva, and we may call it a divine body—a body of enlightenment and of compassion—in which the Bodhisattva lives as a superman. This body of bliss has been described in the Mahāyānic texts, although generally vaguely but poetically; but our stress is on the point that the Buddhists also believed strongly in the possibility of a supra-mundane divine body.

This ideal of Bodhisattvahood—a self-imposed life of a missionary in an effulgent body of light and bliss, working for the uplift of all beings—has its analogy in the ideal of the immortal spiritual existence of the Nātha *gurus* of India in a dematerialized divine body for the guidance and the inspiration of followers. The Nātha Siddhas, a well-known sect of Indian *yogins*, have rather a well-defined conception of the divine body. As a Śaivite sect of *yogins* they aimed at the attainment of perfect Śivahood by their yogic practices. But what is the essential nature of Lord Śiva? It is absolute immutability in a spiritual body of knowledge and of bliss.

How can such a state of immutability in a spiritual existence be attained? It is not by the

total negation of our mundane existence in the corporeal form; it is by a process of transformation and transubstantiation of this very corporeal form. The idea of liberation generally implies a final dissolution of the corporeal form, or the final dissociation of the spirit from the body. But the Siddhas were strongly opposed to this ideal of post-mortem liberation; instead of trying to liberate their spirit or the soul-substance from the fetters of bondage in the material body, they tried to spiritualize the whole being, including the grossly physical body, to change, through a continual process of transformation, the material substance itself into the soul-substance.

This Siddha cult seems to be an offshoot from the ancient school of Rasāyana, or chemistry. It is known to students of ancient Indian chemistry that this science had a theological background. Śiva is the supreme Deity who is Mṛtyuñjaya, or the conqueror of death. To conquer death and to attain an immortal body like that of the Lord is then the final aim of the *yogins* of this school. Death and decay are the inevitable consequences of this physical form; immortality cannot therefore be attained unless the ingredients of this physical form are changed. These chemists, or rather alchemists, were believers in the transubstantiation of matter through the application of a chemical substance; therefore they tried to make the body immutable by changing the very quality

of the ingredients of the body by the application of *rasa*—a chemical combination of mercury and sulphur or mica. This belief in the transubstantiation of the body through the application of *rasa* seems to have acquired some yogic significance even before the advent of Patañjali, the author of the *Yoga Sūtrā* (Aphorisms); for in one of his aphorisms he refers to the possibility of attaining *siddhi* (perfection) even by the application of herbs. In the commentary on the aphorisms, Vyāsa and Vācaspati explain that *siddhi* by *auṣadhi* (herb or medicine) refers to the school of *yogins* who attained perfection with the help of Rasāyana. The Nātha Siddhas seem to have taken the incentive from here and changed the chemical process of Rasāyana to a psycho-chemical process of *yoga* where *rasa* means the nectar oozing from the moon, supposed to be situated in the head.

The Siddhas belonged to a school of predominant Haṭha-yoga involving physical and physiological practices. The first target of their *yoga-sādhanā*, or religious endeavour with the help of yogic practices, was *kāya-siddhi*, or the perfection of the body. How can the body be perfected? It can be made perfect by a gradual change of the gross matter. It has been said in some of their texts that this ordinary body has first to be burnt out through the continual application of the fire of *yoga*. So far as the physical existence in the

gross matter is concerned, one must be dead first and then the dead body has to be revived through a yogic regulation of the nectar that oozes internally from the moon. This process of burning, or rather dematerializing, the body through *yoga* and the revivification through the nectar—the life-giving juice—grants the *yogin* a *siddha-deha*, a perfect body.

But this attainment of the *siddha-deha* is no end in itself, it is but a means to real religious efforts—efforts for the attainment of a *divya-deha*, a divine body, an immutable spiritual body which leads one to ultimate Śivahood. This divine body, the Nātha Siddhas believed, can have free movement in all the three worlds and, perfectly dematerialized as it is, it does not have to adhere to the spatio-temporal laws of the universe. This indestructible spiritual body is absolutely free from the principles of defilement or the *aśuddha-māyā*; but it is associated with the principles of *viśuddha-māyā*, which prevents it from becoming absolutely static and acts as the purified dynamic principle for its further evolution through subtler stages to lead it to the final state of Śivahood. The *yogins* in their divine body are prompted by the principles of *viśuddha-māyā* to benevolent activities, rendering spiritual guidance to innumerable religious aspirants, and this state is the fittest state for becoming a *guru*, or spiritual preceptor.

In the absence of any principle of defilement, benevolent activities in the divine body will never bind one to the world of miseries and sufferings. The Nātha *yogins* believed that Haṭha-yoga does not yield supernatural powers only; it has the capacity of transforming slowly and gradually the substance of the body. Our ordinary life of continual change leading to decay and death is controlled by the ordinary laws of nature, which can act only on the material ingredients of the body. But if the body can be dematerialized, the laws of nature will no longer have any direct sway over it.

The Nātha *yogins* laid particular stress on a set of *yoga* practices for the transubstantiation of body. They held that the gods in heaven have an immortal body because they drink nectar. The Vedic sages also performed the *soma* sacrifice and drank *soma* juice with the idea that it has the power to rejuvenate and invigorate the body in such a way as to make it immortal. The sages drank *soma* themselves and offered it to the gods. It was believed that the moon is the depository of *soma* which bestows the vital power. The Nātha *Siddhas* believed that this moon is situated within the body of man in the highest plexus, *sahasrāra*, situated in the head. Through a continual process of distillation, the quintessence of the whole body is deposited in this moon in the form of *soma* or *sudhā* or *amṛta* (nectar); strict

discipline, physical and mental, and the total arrest of any kind of physical loss will result in the abundant flow of the nectar from the moon. But in the ordinary process, the nectar oozing from the moon trickles down and is eaten by the sun situated in the region of the navel. This sun represents *kālāgni*, the fire of destruction, whereas the moon represents the principle of creation and preservation. This life-giving *soma* or *sudhā* has to be preserved from the all-destroying fire of the sun, and the body, already burnt or withered by the austere practices of yoga, must be rejuvenated with its flow. This process of the body withering and then being rejuvenated with nectar will, the Siddhas believed, ultimately transubstantiate the body which, from being a physical body of change, will be transformed into a divine body of immutability which will be composed of pure spiritual substance.[1]

This conception of a divine body has acquired a deep philosophical and religious significance with reference to the ideal of the divine life as expounded by Śrī Aurobindo. He has realized the truth of a continual flow of *amṛta* (nectar, the flow that makes one immortal) not only behind the life-process of the individual man, but behind the evolution of the whole cosmic process; and that flow is the flow of infinite divine bliss

1 Consult also the next article, pp. 160-62

which is to be attained and utilized, not for the extinction of the being of the man, but to immortalize the being by divinizing the whole of it. It is not merely a Utopian ideal, it is the truth of all truths; for, 'From the divine Bliss, the original Delight of existence, the Lord of Immortality comes pouring the wine of that Bliss, the mystic *soma*, into these jars of mentalized living matter; eternal and beautiful, he enters into these sheaths of substance for the integral transformation of the being and nature.'[1]

Man's spiritual quest has more often than not been along negative lines. To know the truth we always argue that 'this is not the truth', 'that is not the truth'; truth is not in the diversified world of physical forms, it is not in our body of flesh and blood, it is not in our life-process, it is not in our emotions and aspirations, it is not in any of our pleasures and pains; it is the one transcendental Absolute, beyond everything that is. But, according to Śrī Aurobindo, the spiritual march is not a march towards a total negation; it is a path of larger and completer affirmation. Too much stress has been laid on the Upaniṣadic saying that the truth is 'One without a second', but this has not sufficiently been read in the light of the other formula, equally emphatic and imperative. that 'All this is Brahman.'

1 Śrī Aurobindo, *The Life Divine.*

'The passionate aspiration of man upward to the Divine has not been sufficiently related to the descending movement of the Divine leaning downward to embrace eternally Its manifestation. Its meaning in matter has not been so well understood as Its truth in the Spirit.'[1] In catching at the truth we have always rejected the manifestation of truth, but the manifestation is as real as the truth itself only if we can view it rightly as its own manifestation.

Man can attain to perfect manhood by fulfilling God in life, and not by a total rejection of life. His life begins from animal vitality, but achieves its fulfilment in a divine existence. 'Life in its self-unfolding must also rise to ever-new provinces of its own being. But if in passing from one domain to another we renounce what has already been given us from eagerness for our new attainment, if in reaching the mental life we cast away or belittle the physical life which is our basis, or if we reject the mental and physical in our attraction to the spiritual, we do not fulfil God integrally, nor satisfy the conditions of His self-manifestation. We do not become perfect, but only shift the field of our imperfection or at most attain a limited altitude. However high we may climb, even though it be to the Non-Being itself, we climb ill if we forget our base. Not to abandon the lower to itself, but

1 Śrī Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*.

to transfigure it in the light of the higher to which we have attained, is true divinity of nature.'[1]

The spiritual life is generally viewed as a life of ascent. There is the ascent first from matter to life, from life to mind, and from mind to the spirit; but this represents only half of the whole cycle; there is the other half of the descent of the spirit in mind, of the spiritualized mind in life, and of the whole again in matter. Spirit and matter are thus the two poles within which the whole cycle of involution and evolution takes place. We cannot live in the divine by ascending to the highest stage of divinity; divinity must be made to descend gradually to the lowest principle of our life, to the very base of our human life on earth. Every cell of the body has to be spiritualized before we can expect really to have a life divine.

'We may by a progressive expanding or a sudden luminous self-transcendence mount up to these summits in unforgettable moments or dwell on them during hours or days of greatest superhuman experience. When we descend again, there are doors of communication which we can keep always open or reopen, even though they should constantly shut. But to dwell there permanently on this last and highest summit of the created and creative being is in the end the su-

1 Śrī Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*.

preme ideal for our evolving human consciousness when it seeks not self-annulment but self-perfection.'[1] What is needed is a full spiritual transformation, a permanent ascent from the lower to the higher consciousness, and a permanent descent from the higher into the lower nature.

How can this total transformation be effected? It is by surcharging the lower principles by the light and power descending from the supermind. They are received by the mind through the overmind, by life through mind, by matter through life. And through this process the lowest principle becomes transformed into the highest; matter itself becomes spiritualized. As to the possibility of such a transformation, it has been held that both spirit and matter, as the two poles of the creative process, possess the power of both evolution and involution of all principles. When we say from the standpoint of science that life evolves from matter, or that mind evolves from life, 'we accept the Vedantic solution that Life is already involved in Matter and Mind in Life, because in essence Matter is a form of veiled Life, Life a form of veiled Consciousness. And then there seems to be little objection to a farther step in the series and the admission that mental consciousness may itself be only a form and a veil of higher states which are beyond Mind.'[2]

1 Śrī Aurobindo, *The Life Divine.*

2 *Ibid.*

To transform a lower state into a higher means really the removal from the lower of the veil that was obstructing the free play of the higher. The divine does not descend into us because of the veils in between the sheaths of our being, always obstructing the descent and free play of the divine. As these obstructing veils are removed one by one, divine light and power penetrate and permeate our whole being, step by step, till the lowest stage of material existence also becomes divinized; and when the whole being is thus divinized man becomes superman, the man divine. This integral change of the whole being through divine light and power presupposes perfect preparation for the change, for, 'If the psychic mutation has not taken place, if there has been a premature pulling down of the higher Forces, their contact may be too strong for the flawed and impure material of Nature and its immediate fate may be that of the unbaked jar of the Veda which could not hold the divine *soma* wine; or the descending influence may withdraw or be spilt because the nature cannot contain or keep it'.[1]

So long as there is no descent of the divine into all the layers of our being, and no consequent integral transformation of our being, we live in the domain of impure nature and are bound by the ordinary laws of nature. But as soon as the

1 Śrī Aurobindo, *The Life Divine.*

complete mutation takes place, the laws of impure nature lose all power of controlling our being. which is ordained by divine laws. The divine laws are the will of God; the divinized superman therefore becomes a perfect instrument in the hands of God, in and through which God sets forth His divine music in an unobstructed way. In such a state, 'He would feel the presence of the Divine in every centre of his consciousness, in every vibration of his life-force, in every cell of his body. In all the workings of his force of Nature he would be aware of the workings of the supreme World-Mother, the Supernature; he would see his natural being as the becoming and manifestation of the power of the World-Mother. In this consciousness he would live and act in an entire transcendent freedom, a complete joy of the spirit, an entire identity with the cosmic self and a spontaneous sympathy with all in the universe.'[1]

1 Śrī Aurobindo, *The Life Divine.*

SOME LATER YOGIC SCHOOLS

The later yogic schools of India are fundamentally based on some esoteric yogic practices, which have been current in the country for a very long time. Without entering into the complicated controversy as to whether these were Vedic or non-Vedic in origin, we may say that in some form or other they served as a common heritage for many of the great and small religious sects and sub-sects of India. In later times, these practices were associated with different metaphysical and theological speculations of different schools—Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic—in consequence of which they underwent various transformations, ultimately giving rise to some later esoteric schools.

It is customary to speak of these later esoteric schools as offshoots of Tāntricism. To be precise in our estimate, we must guard ourselves against the vagueness that hangs round the word Tāntricism as used in common parlance. Without going into the etymology of the word *tantra*, we may say that, in spite of the heterogeneous elements incorporated in it, the Tantra, as a religious literature, is concerned primarily with *sādhanā* or religious endeavour, and not with any system of abstract speculation. The different

metaphysical systems deal with the nature of Reality and the philosophic method for its apprehension; but the Tantra lays stress on the practical methods for realizing that Reality. This practical aspect of the *sādhanā* is the essential part of the Tantra.

Now in this practical aspect the whole of Tāntric *sādhanā* was based on a cardinal belief that the truth is to be realized in and through the body. On analysis the statement resolves itself into two fundamental principles: firstly, the truth to be realized resides within the body of man; and secondly, the truth that resides in the body of man is to be realized through the medium of the body.

As for the first principle the belief of the Tāntrikas is that the ultimate Truth is not an abstract principle transcending the universe, but is immanent in it, and that the human body is not merely a thing in the universe, but is an epitome of the universe—a microcosm in relation to the macrocosm. There is therefore nothing in the universe which is not there in the body of man. There is a perfect parallelism between the physical processes of the universe and the biological processes in the body of man. With this idea in view, the Tantras try to locate the sun, the moon, the stars, the important mountains, islands, and rivers of the exterior world within the human body; the time-element of the universe in all its

phases of day and night, fortnight, month, and year have often been explained with reference to the course of the vital wind (*prāṇa* and *apāna*). The implication seems to be that the human body, with its physical structure and biological processes, represents the manifestation of the same energy which is at play in the structure and processes of the vast cosmos. The human form is therefore the abode of truth of which the universe is a manifestation in infinite space and eternal time. Instead of being lost in the vastness of the incomprehensible universe and groping in its unfathomable mystery, the *sādhaka* should concentrate his attention on himself and realize the truth within, with the clear conviction that the truth that is realized within is the truth that pervades the universe without. The second principle points out that the body, according to the Tāntric *yogins*, is not only the abode of truth, but is also the best medium for realizing the truth. This, in a nutshell, is the *yantra-tattva* of the Tantras.

Predominance of *haṭhayoga* is a remarkable factor in Tāntric practices; and these Haṭha-yogic practices are not, as commonly believed, so many physical feats, adopted only with a view to gaining some occult power; they are practices through which the body is transformed into the best medium or instrument for realizing the truth. According to the Tāntric *yogins*, different plexuses (or lotuses, as they are called), nerves, and nerve-

centres represent different *tattvas* (realities or essential principles), but the *tattvas* represented by them lie latent, until they are made patent through proper yogic culture and control. This subtle analysis of the physical (including the biological) system of man and the formulation of processes, through which this physical system may be transformed into a perfect instrument for reflecting the truth, constitute the best contribution of the Tantras.

To make a general survey of the later yogic cults, we may start with different Sahajiyā schools. The Sahajiyās, whether Buddhists, Vaiṣṇavas, or others, were all in a sense Tāntrikas; for the *raison d'être* of these schools is to be found in a particular 'sexo-yogic' Tāntric practice. Vedic or non-Vedic in origin, this 'sexo-yogic' Tāntric practice, as a part of the religious *sādhanā*, captured, at different times, the mind of a set of *sādhakas* professing different faiths, and thus gave rise to different esoteric schools.

According to the Hindu Tantras, where we find it best explained, the absolute Reality, which is neutral by nature, has two aspects within it, *nivṛtti* and *pravṛtti*, which may be rendered as static and dynamic, or as negative and positive. In the Tantras these are generally conceived of as Śiva and Śakti. Śiva is pure consciousness, qualityless, and, as such, the static or the nega-

tive principle, while Śakti is the cosmic energy, the world-force, and, as such, the dynamic or the positive aspect of Reality. But neither Śiva by himself nor Śakti by herself is the ultimate Truth; they are not even separable; the highest Truth is the state of neutrality produced through the union of Śiva and Śakti. The point to note here is that the union of Śiva and Śakti, which under one condition, produces the highest state of neutrality in infinite bliss, produces, under different conditions, the world of manifestation, or the phenomenal process as a whole. When Śakti, associated with all her principles of illusion and defilement, dominates, the union of Śiva-Śakti, which takes place in the realm of *pravṛtti*, becomes responsible for the creation of the visible world; but when Śakti rises to Śiva in a process of introversion, their union results in a state of neutrality in infinite bliss and tranquillity. So the union that binds may also liberate.

According to the *sādhakas*, or the practical *yogins*, this *tattva* of Śiva-Śakti lies within the body of man. Without entering into the details of the Tāntric *sādhanā*, we may state that Śiva is conceived of by the *yogins* as residing in the highest plexus (*sahasrāra*) in the cerebral region, and Śakti is conceived of as residing in the lowest plexus (*mūlādhāra*, the sacrococcygeal plexus); the *sādhanā* consists in raising Śakti from the lowest plexus and making her proceed

in an upward movement till she becomes united with Śiva. Again, the right side of the body is believed to be the region of Śiva, and the left that of Śakti; this will explain the Tāntric and Purāṇic conception of Ardhanārīśvara, *i.e.*, the Lord as half woman and half man. The important nerve on the right side, well known as *piṅgalā*, through which flows the *apāna* air or current, is said to represent the principle of Śiva, while the left nerve, known as *iḍā*, through which flows the *prāṇa* air, is said to represent the principle of Śakti. The *sādhanā* consists mainly in uniting Śiva-Śakti by a perfect commingling of the right and left in various ways and neutralizing their functions in a middle course, called *suṣumṇā*, which is the way to neutrality or perfect equilibrium of opposing currents. Again, man represents Śiva and woman represents Śakti; the perfect bliss that results from a strict discipline and yogic control of their union leads one to perfect tranquillity, which is the state of the Absolute.

Let us now see how this Tāntric *sādhanā* was adopted by a school of later Buddhists. Several centuries after the demise of Lord Buddha, the spirit of revolution, which served as the very kernel of all Buddhistic thought and religion, instead of accelerating with the course of time, was being retarded as a result of slow but continual friction with the current Hindu

thoughts and practices. As a result, there seems to have developed a spirit of compromise. This spirit of compromise, combined with the Mahāyānic spirit of catholicity in throwing the portals of Buddhism wide open to people of various tastes, temperaments, and capacities, was responsible for the absorption of many of the important Hindu practices into Buddhism itself. This indicates the process by which Tāntricism made its way into Buddhism, giving rise to a composite religion, popularly known as Tāntric Buddhism. About the tenth century A.D., an offshoot of this composite religion developed some tendencies of its own, with exclusive stress on a system of *yoga*, and this school is popularly known as Sahajiyā Buddhism.

These Sahajiyā Buddhists (or the Tāntric Buddhists in general) developed a theology of their own, which is substantially different from the philosophy and religion of canonical Buddhism. It would be wrong to believe that the theology developed first and the yogic practices were adopted later on as required by the theology; on the other hand, we are tempted to believe that the practices were adopted first by a band of *sādhakas*, to whom the spirit of orthodox Buddhism was long lost and yet who were professed Buddhists; and a theology crystallized round these practices gradually with the materials supplied from popular Buddhist thoughts and ideas.

According to these esoteric Buddhists, *bodhicitta* is the highest Truth, it is the Absolute. It is the *sahaja*, the innate nature of the self and the world. This *bodhicitta* is explained as a unified state of *śūnyatā* (void) and *karuṇā* (universal compassion). What is *śūnyatā* ? It is a perfect knowledge of the essencelessness of all that is and is not—it is perfect wisdom or *prajñā*. This *prajñā* is the static or the passive aspect of Reality. *Karuṇā*, as a strong emotion of compassion, is the dynamic principle that leads one to an active life for the liberation not only of the self, but also of others; it is therefore the active principle and is called the *upāya* (the means).[1] *Prajñā*, as pure consciousness (*vijñapti-mātratā*) or pure wisdom, represents the domain of *nivṛtti*, while *upāya*, as the active principle, represents the domain of *pravṛtti*. Thus *prajñā* and *upāya* stand in esoteric Buddhism for the same principles as Śiva and Śakti in the Hindu Tantras, the only difference being that, unlike Hinduism, the passive principle is taken here to be the Lady or the Goddess, while the active principle is the Lord.

In practice, this esoteric yogic school of Buddhism holds, as is consistent with the spirit of the Tantras, that the body is the abode of truth and, at the same time, the best instrument or medium

1 For a detailed study of *prajñā* and *upāya*, see S. B Das Gupta, *Obscure Religious Cults as Background of Bengali Literature.*

for realizing the truth. With this belief, it located four plexuses or lotuses in different parts of the body along the spinal column.[1] The first is the *maṇipura-cakra* or the *nirmāṇa-cakra* situated in the navel region, representing the *nirmāṇa-kāya*, or the principle of material transformation; the second is the *anāhata-cakra* or the *dharma-cakra* situated in the cardiac region, representing the *dharma-kāya*, or the principle of non-dual cosmic existence; and the third is the *sambhoga-cakra* situated near the neck, representing the *sambhoga-kāya*, or the principle of the body of bliss. Above all these and transcending all these is the lotus (or plexus) in the head (*uṣṇīṣa-kamala*), which is the seat of the absolute Truth. The cosmic energy (conceived as a feminine principle) remains as a fierce fire-force (*caṇḍālī*) in the *nirmāṇa-cakra*, and here, associated with all gross principles of defilement, she acts as the principle of phenomenalism. She must be roused and dissociated from all principles of defilement and given an upward motion, so as to reach the *uṣṇīṣa-kamala*, which is the region of perfect rest and purity. Again, the important nerve on the left side of the body, called the moon or the river Gaṅgā, represents *prajñā*, the Lady, and the nerve on the right side, called the sun or the river Yamunā, represents the *upāya*, the Lord.

1 *Ibid.*, IV.

The left and the right should be controlled and commingled in such a way that all their functions (including the flow of the vital currents *prāṇa* and *apāna* in the two nerves) may be completely unified in the middle path, called the *avadhūtī*,[1] such perfect unification resulting, ultimately, in the realization of infinite bliss (*mahāsukha*), which is the quintessence of the *bodhicitta*. Again, *prajñā*, or the Goddess, manifests herself in every woman, and every man is the embodiment of *upāya*, the Lord (the ovum being the symbol for the Goddess and the seed for the Lord). In actual *sādhanā*, the man and the woman must first of all transcend their corporeal existence and realize their true self as *upāya* and *prajñā* respectively; with such a realization they should unite and control the sex-act in such a way that the downward motion of the seed may be arrested and an upward motion[2] given to it till it reaches the highest plexus and remains there motionless. This motionless state of the seed in the highest plexus conduces to infinite bliss and tranquillity, and the realization of the highest bliss is the realization of the highest Truth, for bliss is the ultimate nature of Truth. *Prajñopāya* is therefore equivalent to *mahāsukha* (supreme bliss) and *samantabhadra* (entirely auspicious).

1 *Avadhūtī* has been explained in the Tāntric Buddhist texts as that which, through its effulgent nature, destroys all sin.

2 See *Sekoddeśa-ṭīkā* (Gaekwad's Oriental Series).

We find a new transformation of this 'sexo-yogic' practice in the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā school. Here the *yoga* is more psychological than physical or physiological. Let us first see how the yogic practice could be associated with the theology of Vaiṣṇavism, which is predominantly a school of devotion. As *bodhicitta* was conceived of in Sahajiyā Buddhism as the *sahaja* or the innate nature of the self and the world around, so in Sahajiyā Vaiṣṇavism love was conceived of as the *sahaja*. This *sahaja* or the Absolute playfully divides itself into two, as the lover and the beloved, as the enjoyer and the enjoyed, as Kṛṣna and Rādhā; this playful division of the one into two is for nothing but self-realization. In terms of the Sahajiyās, the *sahaja* manifests itself in two currents; *rasa* (love) and *rati* (the exciting cause of love and the support of love), and these two currents of *rasa* and *rati* are represented by Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. Again, it is held that man and woman on earth are but physical representations of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, or *rasa* and *rati* of Goloka; in the corporeal forms, man and woman represent the *rūpa* or external manifestation of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, who reside, so to speak, in every man and woman as the *svarūpa* or the true spiritual self. The *sādhanā* consists first in the realization of the *svarūpa* in *rūpa*, and after this realization, the pair should unite in love; the realization of infinite bliss that follows from such a union is the highest spiritual

gain. The yogic *sādhanā* practised by the Vaiṣnava Sahajiyās is substantially the same as practised by the Tāntrikas, with the modification that the former do not stop with the yogic practices, but resort to them mainly as preparatory to the union in love.

If we examine the doctrines and practices of the Sahajiyās from the point of view of Pātañjala Yoga philosophy, we shall find that the final aim in all such cases is the attainment of an infinitely blissful state of arrest (*samādhi*), either purely through a psycho-physiological process of *yoga* or through the absorbing emotion of love, strictly disciplined and intensified through practices of *yoga*. Intense human love, or sex pleasure, transformed beyond recognition, through strict physical and psychological discipline according to yogic practices, has the capacity to produce a supreme state of arrest.[1] In a unique flow of intensely blissful realization, uninterrupted by the notions of subjectivity and objectivity, there dawns an infinite oneness in the mind, which is said to be the state of *samarasa* (unity of emotion). As it is said in Yoga philosophy that, when the states and processes of the mind are arrested, the *yogin* remains in his *svarūpa* (own true nature), so the Sahajiyās also say that, when all the subjective

1 In this connection, see *Spanda-kārikā* (Vizianagram Sanskrit Series) and *Vijñāna-bhairava* (Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies)—two important texts of the Kashmir school of Śaivism.

and objective disturbances of the mind are absolutely lost in a supreme realization of bliss, we attain our true self, which is *sahaja*. To judge this state of *samarasa* or *sahaja* as a pure state of *yoga*-arrest (*samādhi*), we should first of all examine the plane of mind (*citta-bhūmi*) in which people practise *yoga*. If it be a mere state of sleep of the senses, or a state of swoon of a temporary nature, it cannot be recognized as a state of *yoga* proper. The Sahajiyās were conscious of this possible confusion and the consequent aberrations and it is because of this that they laid down elaborate and stringent preparatory conditions, before one was allowed to be initiated into these esoteric cults.

The Nātha cult, another esoteric yogic cult of much importance, seems to be synchronous with the Buddhist Sahajiyā cult, though, however, the origin of the cult may be traced to a much earlier date. It was essentially a Śaiva yogic school and developed, most probably, from the early Siddha cult of India. This school also is fundamentally based on the belief of the two aspects of the absolute Reality, represented by the sun and the moon, where the sun stands for the principle of destruction (*kālāgni*), through the process of death and decay, and the moon stands for the principle of immutability. The final aim of the Nātha Siddhas is the attainment of a non-dual state, through the attainment of immortality, in a

perfect and divine body. This non-dual state of immortality, which is the state of the great Lord (Maheśvara), can be attained only through the union, or rather the commingling, of the sun and the moon. In its speculations on the attainment of an immutable and divine body, through the process of *haṭhayoga*, involving the theory of the sun and the moon, the Nātha cult seems to be akin to the Rasāyana school of Indian thought,[1] the main difference being that the medical and chemical science of Rasāyana became transformed into a science of *yoga* with the Nātha Siddhas.

The main *sādhanā* of the Nātha Siddhas is well known as the culture of the body (*kāya-sādhanā*). This culture of the body implies its transubstantiation first into a subtle ethereal body and that again, finally, into an immutable divine body having an eternal existence. According to these *yogins*, the moon, which is the depository of *soma* or *amṛta* (nectar), is situated just below the *sahasrāra*, the lotus of thousand petals. The quintessence of the visible body is distilled in the form of *soma* in the moon; this *soma* rejuvenates the body and makes it immortal. In the ordinary course, this *soma* trickles down from the moon above and is dried up by the sun, the fire of destruction, situated in the navel plexus; this drying up of the *soma* by the sun leads ordinary beings to decay and death. This *soma*

1 S. B. Das Gupta, *op. cit.*, IX.

(also called *mahārasa*, the great juice) must be protected from the sun. How is that to be done? There is a curved duct (*baṅka nāla*, as described in the vernacular texts) from the moon to the hollow in the palatal region; it is like a serpent with mouths at both ends, and is well known in *yoga* physiology as *śaṅkhinī*. The mouth of this duct, through which *soma* pours down from the moon, is called the tenth door of the body (*daśama-dvāra*), as distinguished from the other nine ordinary doors. This tenth door must be shut up or well guarded, otherwise the best wealth of man will be stolen by the sun or *kāla* (time, death). How is the *soma* or *amṛta* to be saved from the sun? There are various yogic processes described in Haṭha-yogic and Tāntric texts. The main thing is a process of turning the tongue backwards into the hollow above, so as to reach the tenth door, and of fixing the sight between the eyebrows. The tongue, thus extended backwards, shuts up the tenth door, and the nectar, thus saved, is drunk by the *yogin* himself. In some of the texts, this secretion of nectar from the moon is associated with the rousing of *kula-kuṇḍalinī śakti* (the serpent power, lying dormant in the lowest plexus), and it is held that the rousing of this *śakti* and her march to the *sahasrāra* are instrumental in the trickling down of the nectar.[1]

1 For the ideal and practices of the Nātha Siddhas consult pp. 136-41 of the previous article.

It is very interesting to note how the *yoga* ideals and practices greatly influenced a section of the Muslims of India. The influence of *yoga* on the practices of the Sufis is undeniable; but apart from this general influence of *yoga* on Sufism, there grew a school of Bengal Muslims, mostly hailing from the rural areas, who adopted fragments of *yoga* ideals and practices and synthesized them with the popular Islamic faith and ideas. The body has often been described by the village poets as the 'palace of the king'; the various plexuses have been described as the various lotus-ponds, and the six lotus-ponds (*i.e.* the six plexuses, excluding the highest one, the *sahasrāra*) are again associated with the six seasons. The idea is that as the king dallies in different seasons in different ponds, specially suited to the different seasons, so the one ultimate Truth resides and functions differently in the different plexuses. Again, in some of the texts we find that the ultimate Reality has two aspects, one aspect is symbolized by *vasanta* (spring) and the other by *hemanta* (the season of harvest, comprising the months of Kārttika and Agrahāyaṇa). *Hemanta* is the principle of phenomenalism, while *vasanta* is the path of introversion, the path for a return to the noumenon. *Vasanta* is *yoga*, union with the all-pervading One; *hemanta* is the whirl of the world process. The former is the principle of immutability; the latter is the principle of death and decay. The

path of *yoga* is the path to *amṛta* (nectar, immortality), and the path of phenomenalism is the path of *kāla* (time, death). We have therefore to proceed in an introverted process from the world of becoming to the ultimate truth of Being.[1]

Another point to note is that many of the minor religious sects of later times spoke of *anāhata-yoga* among various other things, and this idea and practice of *anāhata-yoga* exerted strong influence on the Muslim *yogins* of Bengal also. What is this *anāhata-yoga*? The word *anāhata* generally stands for *anāhata-dhvani*, which means the uncreated and unobstructed sound, which is all-pervading and eternal. In the process of *becoming* of the Being, the first stage is the *śakti* (power) and the next stage is the sound, the cosmic vibration from which evolves the visible world. It is the first music, the cosmic music, the divine music The plexus in the heart is the seat of this *anāhata*. To listen to it, the yogin must withdraw his senses from outward objects, turn them inwards and then concentrate the mind on the centre in the heart; through such concentration and some accessory yogic practices, the mystery of *anāhata* becomes unfolded to the *sādhaka*, and he comes to be in tune with the cosmic rhythm, which arrests all the states and processes of the mind and draws

1 See Ali Raja, *Jñāna-sāgara* (in Bengali).

the *sādhaka* near to God.[1] The mediaeval devotional lyricists took this *anāhata* as the divine music and spoke frequently of it. The Muslim yogins of Bengal held that over the material body is the subtler principle of mind, above mind is the higher principle of divine lustre, and above this divine lustre, again, is the *anāhata*, which leads one to God.

1 Many other Haṭha-yogic prartices are prescribed in the various yogic texts for the realization of this *nāda* (sound).

THE INDIAN ATTITUDE TOWARDS NATURE

When we speak of the attitude of a whole nation towards something, what we actually do is to focus our attention on the peculiar mental set-up and the consequent mental quality of the nation concerned. Even admitting the fact that human nature is fundamentally the same in all ages and in all countries, we notice a certain difference in the mental quality of nations, which is determined by the variation in their environment as well by their peculiar modes of life; and this difference in the mental quality is again responsible for the difference in the philosophy, literature, art, and culture that we notice among the nations of the world. Hence, in order to understand the Indian attitude towards nature, we must know the special quality of the Indian mind as revealed in our vast and varied literature.

The Attitude of The Vedic Poets

We may begin with the Vedas. The treatment of nature in the Vedas is a familiar subject, inasmuch as volumes have been written on it in the course of deciphering the original traits and tendencies of Indian religion and philosophy. In these discussions, emphasis has been laid on the primitive inclination to personify the forces of

nature, indeed all important natural phenomena, and deifying them either plainly or vaguely. The stimulus behind this inclination is not far to seek; it may mainly be ascribed to the general primitive urge towards anthropomorphism.

With the dawn of understanding, man found himself placed in a world where everything around appeared to be alien to him, which was, indeed, a very embarrassing position. He could not feel comfortable in an environment where everything was unknown to him, for to leave something unknown is virtually to allow something alien. There was naturally a compelling desire to know all about the universe around him. But then how to know? To know, in a sense, is to make homogeneous, for to know something is to integrate it with the known materials of one's mind. And what were the first known materials of man's mind? The first thing known to man was his own self. Naturally, in his attempt to know the things outside, he would try to integrate them with the human behaviours already known to him by making them homogeneous with man, or, in other words, interpreting them purely in terms of man. This explains the personification of the forces of nature and other natural phenomena. What about their deification? This deification may, in the first instance, be explained by referring to the primitive instinct of wonder and awe; wonder and awe gave rise to reverence, and reverence resulted in the

deification of the objects of reverence. Another psychological fact might have contributed to this process of deification and the accompanying attempt at establishing a personal relationship with the deified forces and phenomena of nature. People felt that these forces of nature were superior to them, inasmuch as these forces were affecting their day-to-day life from all sides, but they had no control over them. Acceptance of the superiority of others becomes an insult offered to oneself which can be minimised only by establishing some sort of a personal and cordial relationship between the superior and the inferior. May be the Vedic poets tried to compromise their position, placed as they were in the scheme of the universe, by glorifying nature and keeping a personal relationship with her wherever and howsoever possible.

From another point of view, we may say that, if we consider the Vedic hymns as a whole and study them more closely, their treatment of nature may reveal something more than the primitive instinct of animism and anthropomorphism. Nature has not always been deified in the Vedic hymns ; we find at places descriptions of nature which indicate that she was intuitively felt to be something more than a conglomeration of material phenomena or blind forces. The rivers have often been invoked as mothers, and they have been asked to nurture man with their butter-like and

honey-like water, as the mother nourishes her child with the milk of her breasts (*Ṛg-Veda*, X. 64. 9). At places, it seems that the Vedic poets sincerely believed that the waters, with their murmuring sound, have really a language which they (the Vedic poets) could somehow understand (*Ibid.*, IV. 18. 6). In the well-known dialogue between the sage Viśvāmitra, on the one hand, and the turbulent mountain-streams Śatadru and Vipāśā, on the other, we find that the rivers obstructed the path of the sage when he was returning home with various gifts after performing a sacrifice; the sage first arrogantly asked the rivers to subside, which the rivers stoutly refused to do; but when entreated in a submissive tone, they replied, 'Yes, we agree to subside as the mother bends down before the child for facilitating its sucking' (*ni te naṇsai pīpyāneva yoṣā*) (*Ibid.*, 33. 10). The simile seems to be deeply significant as giving a clue to the feeling of the Vedic poets towards such natural phenomenon.

There are, again, some hymns to the night, where the night has been invoked as the daughter of the sky, as the abode of all that move (during the day). She (the night) pervades all quarters, shines with the stars, covers all who live on earth and also those above; the villages are silent, the walkers, the birds, and the beasts, all are asleep in peace. The Vedic poet cannot but hope that this night will be beneficent to all (*Ibid.*, X. 127).

There is also a hymn to the forest which begins like this: 'O deep forest, O deep forest, who seem to be disappearing while I am gazing on, don't you enquire the whereabouts of the village? Are you not afraid of thus being all alone?' (*Ibid.*, X. 146). There is another hymn addressed to the presiding deity of the fields, where we find a sincere prayer that the field, the plough, the bull, the rains from the sky, the herbs, and the corn all may combine to give man health, wealth, and peace of mind (*Ibid.*, IV. 57). A similar sentiment may be found beautifully expressed in the well-known hymn of the *Yajur-Veda*, where it has been said: 'Wind blows honey in all the seasons; honey is borne by the flow of rivers; let the herbs be all honey to us; let the night as well as the dawn prove honey to us; honey be the dust of the earth; honey be the world above with all our forefathers; honey be the trees of the forest; honey be the sun —let our cows bear honey for us.'

It is a well-known fact that the sky above and the earth beneath have often been conceived in the Vedas as the father and the mother. Rain comes from the father sky, which is received by the mother earth; and she bears all herbs and plants, corn, flowers, and fruits. This Vedic conception of the earth as the mother was not a mere figure of speech; anyone who has acquaintance with the hymn to the mother earth in the *Atharva-Veda* will testify to the fact that such a conception was

based on firm conviction. Repeatedly does the Vedic poet exclaim: 'Earth is my mother; I am the son of mother earth' (*mātā bhūmiḥ putra ahaṃ pṛthivyāḥ*). She has been entreated to nourish us by the water of her streams, as the mother nourishes the child by the milk of her breasts. Not only that, the poet further says, as the child nursed in the lap of the mother is imbued with the smell of the body of the mother, so let him (the poet) be imbued with the smell that saturates the body of the mother earth. The poet salutes mother earth with all her mountains, stony tracks, and green fields of vegetation, and he prays that all her summers, rains, autumns, winters, and springs, all her days and nights, may pour delight on him; all her villages, fields, and forests may vouchsafe life and vigour.

If we closely follow hymns of this type, it will become clear to us that at least some of the Vedic poets deeply realized in the core of their being a homogeneity between their own individual life-process and the rest of the cosmic order. This sense of homogeneity, we are tempted to believe, sprang from a deep realization of oneness with the whole universe. There seems to have been a strong feeling, ultimately resulting in profound faith, that our human individuality is just a part of an all-absorbing entity, of which the whole universe is a manifestation in time and space. There must be one supreme power and truth com-

prehending both man and the world of man, and uniting the many into an integrated whole. The sense of homogeneity is consequent on this realization of unity.

The Attitude of The Upaniṣadic Sages

In this interpretation of the attitude of the Vedic poets towards nature, we get very strong support from the sayings of the Āraṇyakas and the Upaniṣads also. The keynote of the Āraṇyakas and the Upaniṣads is: 'The One shines forth, and everything else shines after it; everything else shines with the lustre of the One.' The One is the moving force of the external nature in the form of universal energy, and the same One is the inner controller of everything in the form of universal consciousness. This attitude of the Upaniṣadic sages becomes apparent when all the striking phenomena of nature are explained, in many of the Upaniṣads, as a process of sacrifice (*yajña*).

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* Upaniṣad opens with a description of the whole universal process and compares it with a horse-sacrifice (*aśvamedha-yajña*), where it has been said that the dawn is the mouth of the horse, the sun and the moon are its eyes, the vast intermediate region its belly, etc. It has been repeatedly said that he who contemplates this universal process as a sacrifice really attains and enjoys the fruits (the benefits) of the horse-sacrifice. In many places, after des-

cribing, in some detail, some aspects of the workings of nature, the sages have added that he who realizes how the divergent elements of nature work mysteriously in unison, as do the elements and accessories in a sacrifice, will also realize how the one power and will is acting behind the universal process, shaping it to its eternal destiny; and that realization is the best fruit that one can enjoy by performing the real sacrifice. Sacrifice here seems to mean the sacrifice of the individuality to an all-comprehensive totality.

Nature as Depicted in The Epics

A study of Indian literature, in its different stages, beginning with the Vedas down to our own times, will reveal that, even in the sphere of literature, this idea of oneness, of this cosmic unity, is innate in the Indian mind. In the periods of both the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, the literary sentiment may be said to have been subservient to the religious sentiment; but even in those periods when the literary sentiment predominated, this innate idea of the cosmic unity substantially influenced the poetic mind directly or indirectly.

Coming to the age of the epics, that is, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, we are struck with a pleasant though somewhat confusing, story that Sītā, a maiden just in the prime of youth, was sent to man by her mother, the earth.

This was no mythological belief with Vālmīki, the poet-author of the *Rāmāyaṇa*; it was a realism in his poetic mind, as will appear from the very realistic description in the *Rāmāyaṇa* of how Sītā, when she first appeared before man toiling in the field, was bedecked with the sacred dust of the field in the same way as a maiden is bedecked by her mother with the pollen of the lotus (*padma-reṇu-nibhaiḥ kīrṇā subhaiḥ kedāra-pāṃśubhiḥ*, *Sundarakāṇḍa*, Bengali edition, XVI. 16).

Sītā is the daughter of the mother earth not merely by tradition; all the subsequent descriptions of Sītā with reference to nature will corroborate this fact. We may cite a few instances. When Sītā went to the forest for years in exile with Rāma, she made herself at home with all the surroundings and the denizens of the forest. The rivers with their murmuring and chuckling sound became her intimate friends, with whom she could pass her time in casual gossip. The plants with their foliage and shooting buds were like children nursed by her; and young elephants and deer of various types were her playmates. On the day she was kidnapped by the demon Rāvaṇa, when she was all alone in her cottage in the forest, to whom could she make an appeal? She appealed to the whole landscape, to the *karṇikāra* flowers, to the river Godāvarī full of cranes and herons, to the presiding deities over the tall trees, all the birds and beasts, and other creatures of

the forest; she was fervently appealing to all of them to hurry up and inform her husband Rāma that she was being molested and kidnapped by Rāvana (*Araṇyakāṇḍa*, Bengali edition, XLIX). What was the result? The whole forest, with trees and streams, beasts and birds, was astir with rage, wrath, and indignation. The branches of big trees were moving violently in a stormy wind, and the birds perching on them raised a hue and cry. The lotuses in the ponds became distorted, and restless became all the fish and other aquatic animals. It seemed that the ponds were lamenting like timid female friends. The rocks and hillocks were shedding tears through springs and fountains, and with their raised arms the peaks, were protesting and snorting indignantly. All the denizens of the forest, including lions, tigers, deer, and birds of all sorts, were following the shadow of Sītā, as she was being carried in mid-air, and they were cursing Rāvaṇa for his heinous act and calling for justice against the crime (*Ibid.*, LII).

When Rāma returned to the cottage and found Sītā missing, what did he do? He, in his turn, approached individually the trees and creepers, the rivers, the birds, and the beasts, and sought information about Sītā from them. He entreated the sun, who is the witness of all the activities of the world, and the wind, who has access to all quarters, to enlighten him on the where-

abouts of his wife. And how did he get the clue as to what had happened to Sītā? He found before him a flock of deer staring at him continuously and significantly, and it appeared to him from their movements and gestures that they were eager to give him some information. He asked of them by gesture the whereabouts of Sītā, and at once the flock of deer jumped towards the south indicating the direction in which she had been carried away (*Ibid.*, XLIV).

Descriptions of this type abound in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. On the eve of his going to the forest, when Rāma, along with Sītā, his newly married wife, and Lakṣmaṇa, his younger brother, was bidding adieu to his mother Kausalyā, she was praying for the safety of her son in the dense forest. But to whom did she pray? First, of course, to the inscrutable law or principle (*dharma*) which guides the physical and moral worlds, and then to the forests and mountains, rivers and lakes, trees and groves, birds, beasts, and reptiles; to mother earth beneath, the sky above, and the vast intermediate region; to the stars and the planets; to the seasons, months, days, and nights. Her prayer was, *svasti kurvontu te sadā* (May all of them do good to the little party, and that for all time) (*Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, Bengali edition, XXV). Similar descriptions can be found in the *Mahābhārata* also.

It is necessary to emphasize in this connection

that such descriptions of nature were not mere poetic fancies, but seem to be inspired by a deep-rooted conviction. The line of demarcation between the animate and the inanimate was not distinct with these ancient poets of India; the one seems to verge upon the other easily and imperceptibly. Saplings have often been described in the epics as children; and that is so because of a strong conviction that they, too, are the manifestations of the same vital power which is manifesting through us. It has been argued in the Mahābhārata that creepers and trees are as much animate as the human beings are, for they, too, can see. hear, smell, taste, and touch just as the human beings do. Plants have the sense of joy and sorrow; they can themselves repair their damaged parts, and this being so, how can it be said that they are devoid of life and mind? The skin (bark) of the tree is affected by both heat and cold, and that shows its power of tactual perception; the tree is affected by a thunderous sound, so it has to be admitted that the tree has auditory power; plants and creepers can take advantageous positions, and choose between circumstances and directions, which certainly speaks of their visual perception; plants have been observed to be affected by the application of good and bad smell, so it has to be admitted that they have even the power of smell; they suck sap from the earth, and they thrive well when watered,

which shows that they have also the power of taste. Then how can we say that they are not animate in the same way as we are? (*Śānti-parvan*, CLXXII).

We find an echo of the same sentiment in the oft-quoted saying of the *Manu-Saṃhitā* · 'They (plants) possess inner consciousness and have the realization of both happiness and sorrow (*antaḥ-saṃjñā bhavantyete sukha-duḥkha-samanvitāḥ*).

The Attitude of the Classical Poets

This tradition of the epics was inherited by the classical poets. We have mentioned earlier that the rivers in the forest were like so many intimate female friends to Sītā. In the *Uttara-rāma-carita* of Bhavabhūti, we find that not only the forest near about the hermitage of the sage Vālmīki (who had sheltered Sītā when she had been banished by Rāma himself, but also the rivers Tamasā and Muralā, flowing near the hermitage, are depicted in the role of female characters, as the mates (*sakhī*) of Sītā, and the young elephant, as her pet child.

The same tradition was also followed by Kālidāsa. We find in his *Raghu-vamśa* that, when the news of her banishment came to her very abruptly as a hard blow, Sītā succumbed to it and fell senseless on her own mother, the earth. She dropped on the earth, scattering away the golden ornaments on her person, just as a creeper blown mercilessly by a sudden gust of wind, scatters all

its ornaments of flowers. And what was the response from the mother earth? The peacocks of the forest abandoned their dance all of a sudden; the trees shed all their flowers; the deer dropped all the grass they had in their mouths; and there was a great cry in the whole forest in sympathy with Sītā. And that was the response from the mother earth (XIV). When Sītā was lamenting her loneliness in the hermitage of Vālmīki, the sage advised her to take courage and to nourish the saplings of the hermitage by pouring on them milk (water) from the pots (which are compared to the breasts of the mother); and this, he said, would give her the experience of feeding and nursing the baby even before she actually attained motherhood (XIV. 78).

Apart from the case of Sītā, whose episode became more or less a tradition with the later poets, description of young plants calling forth filial affection characterizes the entire literature of Kālidāsa. In describing the *devadāru* tree in front of the abode of Śiva, it is said in the *Raghuvaṃśa*: 'Do you find that *devadāru* tree which has been accepted as a son by Śiva himself (the god who has the bull as his mount)? That tree has the experience of sucking the milk pouring from the golden pot-like breasts of Pārvatī, the mother of Skanda. Once the (skin-like) bark of the tree got scratched when an wild elephant rubbed its trunk against it; and for that Pārvatī

lamented exactly in the same way as she did when her own son (Skanda) was wounded by the weapons of the demons' (II. 36-37). Exactly the same sentiment is expressed in the *Kumāra-sambhava* in connection with the nursing of the plants by the maiden Umā (Pārvatī) (V. 14). In the *Śakuntalā* (I) also, we find the heroine expressing a similar sentiment to the other maidens who were watering the plants of the hermitage along with her. She says, '(I water the plants) not merely because of the fact that I am engaged by the revered sage Kaṇva to do so; I do it because I myself have an affection for them, as if we are all so many young ones from the womb of the same mother'.

Kālidāsa is well known as a great poet of imagination; but so far as the treatment of nature in his works is concerned, he strikes us as a poet of great conviction as much as of imagination. We generally speak highly of his dexterity in all the decorations and embellishments; but subtler and more skilful is his power of gradually and imperceptibly removing the line of demarcation between the different layers of existence in the cosmic scheme. In this respect, Kālidāsa has no theory to propagate; the whole thing is worked out so easily, though skilfully, that we are never given the opportunity of becoming conscious when, where, and how the one fades into the other; neither does he provoke any sudden reaction of

scepticism in our mind to question the why and the how.

The *Kumāra-sambhava* begins with an elaborate description of the mountain Himālaya. Here the poet spares no pains to describe the dominant features of the Himālaya, the mountain, with all its vastness, grandeur, ruggedness, and strangeness. But when the poet, after describing to some extent the mountain Himālaya, introduces the maiden Umā, with all her beauty and charm and in the prime of her youth, as the only daughter of Himālaya, strange to say we never question if a mountain could have a daughter! In fact, we take the whole thing to be quite natural. It is amusing, indeed, to note that throughout the whole work, the Himālaya retains all its features as the great mountain, and, at the same time, expresses all the emotions and performs all the activities of an affectionate father.

Kālidāsa had a subtle technique of his own. In the description of the natural objects, animate or inanimate, he would go on attributing to them all human beauty, charm, and behaviour; and in describing a human being, on the other hand, he would go on attributing to him, or her, all the beauty, charm, and behaviour noticeable in nature. When spring set in untimely in the region of the mountainous forest, where, in the sequestered grove, strictly guarded by his follower Nandīn, Śiva sat calm and quiet in his yogic

posture, absorbed in deep meditation, the trees with their long and robust hands stretched as branches found themselves in deep embrace with the tender creepers with their full-grown breasts of bunches of flowers; the black bees in pairs drank from the same cup of a flower; the male black deer began to caress and coax the she-deer by tenderly scratching her body with his horn; the male elephant under the sway of passion was sprinkling his female mate with the water of the lotus-pond, scented with the pollens of the lotus; and the *cakravāka* bird was flirting with its mate with a portion of the half-chewed stalk of the lotus.

Against the background of such a mysteriously animated region, we find Umā entering with bunches of *aśoka* flowers defying the lustre of the ruby, the *karṇikāra* flowers shining in golden hue, the *sindhuvāra* flowers serving the purpose of a chain of pearls: and she came bearing the flowers of spring in all parts of her body. Slightly bent down due to her full-grown breasts and wrapped in a piece of cloth having the reddish colour of the morning sun, she appeared like a moving creeper bent down with bunches of flowers and wrapped in newly sprung foliage.

Kālidāsa has adopted the same technique in the case of Śakuntalā also, and shows that her existence being inseparably related to the existence of the hermitage, the whole of the hermitage was palpably moved at her departure from there.

In the *Vikramorvaśī*, we have a striking demonstration to show to what extent the being of man can be integrated with the nature around him. The verses composed in Prākṛta introduced skilfully as background music, really hint at the profound background music which human love may have in the sights, sounds, and workings of nature around it. Again, if we consider the *Meghadūta* of Kālidāsa, we shall find that it was not merely his poetic imagination that made him employ the cloud as a messenger from the love-lorn *Yakṣa* to his wife; the plan and execution of the whole poetical work suggest a deeper truth that love is not a prerogative of man alone, it is a vital force that operates as much in the whole of nature as it does in the case of man.

What we have discussed above naturally leads us to hold that, in their treatment of nature, the Indian poets showed a psychological predilection, which was active in the evolution of the Vedāntic monism in the sphere of philosophy. What is suggested by poetic vision is confirmed by discursive argumentation. It may be argued that this monistic, or sometimes pantheistic, as even the so-called panentheistic predilection may not be said to be an exclusive feature of the mind of only Indian poets; a similar tendency may be found in some poets belonging to other lands as well. Although we may discover to a certain degree such a poetic attitude towards nature in some other countries.

we may call this attitude a distinctive feature of the Indian mind, because of the fact that this happens to be the fundamental trait of the poetic mind of India.

The Attitude of the Mystic Poets

Side by side with monistic belief, a cognate belief seems to have influenced the poetic mind of India in the treatment of nature, and that is the belief in a teleology behind all the workings of nature. It is generally believed that nature works for the satisfaction of God. In this, we virtually have an amalgam of monism with the later Sāṃkhya view of the Puruṣa and the Prakṛti, or the Tantra view of Śiva and Śakti. It is not a fact that the poets were consciously influenced by any of the philosophical schools; ideas seem to have been transmitted from generation to generation as social heritage. This idea of nature working for the ultimate satisfaction of Gōd found ample expression in the poems and songs of the mystic poet-saints of India during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Guru Nānak, the great apostle of Sikhism, describes how nature herself is engaged in the worship of God and how she is performing the *ārati* (a mode of waving lamp, incense, flower, and other articles of worship in rhythmic motion before the image of the deity, to the accompaniment of the beat of drums or other musical instru-

ments). The vast blue sky is spoken of as the plate on which the sun and the moon have become the two lights, and the constellations of stars have become the pearls; fire is burning incense; the Lord is being fanned by wind; and all the forests in flower are shedding lustre on the scene. 'How grand is the *āratī* of the Lord; it releases one from the bondage of limited existence; the spontaneous (*anāhata*) sound is serving as the drum!'

Dādū, another mystic poet of the sixteenth century, describes how the earth, the lady in love with the Lord, is dressing herself to please her darling: 'In the region high above is seated the Lord; even without knowing the truth of the Absolute, the earth is dressing herself, wearing a green apparel. The whole of the earth is full of flowers and fruits; the earth has become endless and infinite; the sky (with clouds) roars and fills all with water; and Dādū exclaims in praise!'

The Attitude of a Modern Poet

Coming to our own times, we may refer to the attitude towards nature of a representative Indian poet of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, namely, Rabindranath Tagore. Having drunk deep at the fountain of Upaniṣadic ideas from his boyhood, Tagore throughout was a mystic believer in the unity of the cosmic life. Leaving apart his religious and philosophical writings, which are saturated with this belief in cosmic unity, we shall

try to illustrate his dominant attitude by referring to a few of his poems. In many of his poems, we get an inkling of how he sometimes felt that his own existence was identical with the existence of all that was outside him. Before having a separate existence as an individual man, he was one with the universe as a possibility; and he felt that, behind his irresistible attraction towards nature, there was a faint remembrance of that cosmic union. The fact that it was possible for him to feel every vibration that is produced through the workings of nature, in spite of his separate entity as a man, arises from the fundamental reality of his ample experience of those workings when he had been one with the whole of nature in the forgotten days of the hoary past.

In the poem *The Earth* (*Vasundharā*), the poet says: 'It is because of this (the original unity) that, some day in the present life, when I keep sitting alone by the bank of the river Padmā in a vacant mood, stretching forward these enchanted eyes of mine, I feel in the whole of my body and mind how buds of grass are sprouting in your fields, what flow of vital delight is moving within you day and night.......It is because of this (this unity) that, some day, when the autumnal rays shine on the golden field with its ripe harvest, and the leaves of the cocoanut tree tremble in mild wind dazzling in light, I feel a great perturbation; may be I remember those days when my mind lay

all-pervading, in water and earth, in the leaves of the forest, and in the vast blue of the sky.'

In another poem *The Noon* (*Madhyāhna*), he says: 'I feel as if I have returned to my original birth-place after a long time; as if with all the beasts and birds and insects on earth I have returned one morning to my former birth, when, with the first exhilaration of life, I attached myself fiercely to the sky, air, water, and earth, sucking the primordial flow of delight.' The poet often felt that it was the tyranny of the intellect that snatched him away from the mother earth, from nature as a whole; whenever therefore he could transcend the intellect through his poetic transport, he could transcend also the limits of his individual existence and feel himself one with the whole of nature.

In the poem *The Call from Earth* (*Māṭir Ḍāk*,) he says: 'When, pervading the skirt of the *śāl*-forest, there is a mad rush of air with the deep eagerness of the spring, when throughout the quarters there prevails a thrill of joy caused by a mystic chant through the first mutterings of the foliage, I feel—why I do not know—that the meaning of that muttering lies hidden in the shade of the grove of my heart; it is the reason why the stir of the foliage reaches in a novel tune the whole of my thrilled body. Again, in autumn, in the corn-field by the bank of the river, at the coloured moment of the rising sun, when the green

ocean heaves with the freaks and pranks of the stalks of paddy, by the side of the blue sky, I strongly feel that the vital flow in me has a claim to the invitation of that green; it is why my heart rushes to make an escape to that place of sacrifice, and I do not know through what mistake the key (to enter into that secret) was lost!'

These illustrations give us an idea of the nature-mysticism of Tagore. This nature-mysticism in his literature sprang from the same source and developed on the same line as his life-mysticism. It was his firm conviction that the mystery of all existence—of life and mind—lies hidden in an 'eternal dream', of which he says:

The eternal Dream
is borne on the wings of ageless Light
that rends the veil of the vague,
and goes across Time
Weaving ceaseless patterns of Being.

STUḌIES IN VAIṢṆAVISM

CAITANYAISM—A HISTORICAL STUDY

History in India has got a special character of its own; the course of its evolution is guided no less by the religious leaders and the movements instituted by them than by political personalities and the upheavals engineered by them. The advent of the great Vaiṣṇava apostle Śrī Caitanya in Bengal during the sixteenth century A.C. is more epoch-making in the history of Bengal than any purely political event of the time, be it pertaining to the Muslim rulers of the country or the Hindu feudal chiefs,—and the inspiration derived from the life and teachings of Śrī Caitanya stirred the life of the whole nation in Bengal and Orissa in the social, religious and cultural spheres more than all the political events of the time taken together.

In Bengal and outside Bengal there was a deep religious belief, cherished fervently by a large number of adherents that Śrī Caitanya (or Lord Gaurāṅga as he is more lovingly remembered by the people at large) was the most perfect incarnation of God; if apart from this religious belief we take a purely historical view of the whole thing, two questions of a fundamental nature will suggest themselves for proper analysis and observation. The first question is, what exactly is the place of this Caitanyaism in the religious history

not only of Bengal, but of India? Caitanyaism may rightly be considered as a phenomenon in the religious history of India herself both in consideration of its intrinsic value as a religious school with a definite devotional theology, and in consideration of the influence it exerted on the religious, social and cultural life not only of Bengal, but also of some of the neighbouring provinces, including some portions of Northern India, and even some portions of Southern India, where also Śrī Caitanya undertook a long tour exchanging views with the local Vaiṣṇava saints, impressing them with his own views and being in turn impressed by their views on the nature of divine love and the means for its attainment. The second question is, what was the secret of Śrī Caitanya's success as a religious preacher? How could the new faith and practice propagated by him—not so much by haranguing or sermonising as by his personal behaviour—capture both the head and heart of a large number of devotees belonging to all the strata of society and including among them erudite scholars, first rate poets and laymen of heterogeneous types? The two questions may be dealt with separately one after the other.

It seems very strange at first sight that Śrī Caitanya who got himself initiated first in the sacred religious centre of Gayā in Bihar by Īśvarapurī, apparently a monk belonging to the

holy order of monks established by the staunch Vedāntin Śaṅkarācārya, and who subsequently got his vow of final renunciation of the mundane life from Keśava-bhāratī, another monk belonging to the same order, should himself turn out to be an extremist Vaiṣṇava in the sense that he could think of nothing but divine love as the end as well as the means in man's spiritual march. It is apparently a paradox that his religious views should be directly opposed to all those held by Śaṅkar and the Śaṅkarites. There could not be a big transition all on a sudden, and a preparatory process must have been at work slowly and gradually with a tendency towards a synthesis. Traces of a popular synthesis of this type—a synthesis between Vedāntic monism and a devotional dualism—are not altogether wanting in our old scriptures and we venture to say that the most noted Hindu scripture the *Gītā* bears testimony to it. This tendency towards a synthesis is striking in the views expressed by Śrīdhara Svāmin of the fourteenth century in his well-known commentaries and it has rightly been surmised by scholars that monks of the type of Iśvarapurī and Keśava-bhāratī represented those who were influenced by this process of synthesis. It is significant in this context to mention the religious behaviour of another saint Mādhavendrapurī, briefly described in some of the biographies of Śrī Caitanya, who flourished some time in the fifteenth century, and

who, in spite of being a *Sannyāsin* of the well-known Purī order, fainted in ecstasy even at the very sight of a dark cloud in the sky as it reminded him of Lord Kṛṣṇa of the dark blue colour. These are notable facts and factors in the evolution of the historical figure of Śrī Caitanya. Vaiṣṇavism, as is apparent from the iconographic evidences and the epigraphical records, has been one of the popular religions of Bengal even from the Gupta period. It was no less a living faith in the Pāla period than Buddhism itself, which, in its later Mahāyānic phase, was the professed religion of the royal family. But Vaiṣṇavism seems to have received a new impetus during the reign of the Sena Kings who are supposed to have been professed Vaiṣṇavas. During the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries, Vaiṣṇavism seems to have been developing a new phase in Eastern India by a harmonious blending of the Vedāntic monism with devotional dualism effected not so much through philosophical argumentation or theological dissertations as by the religious behaviour of a class of monks; and historically speaking we may say that we find a culmination of this phase of Eastern Vaiṣṇavism in the life and teachings of Śrī Caitanya.

But this devotionalism in the life of a *Sannyāsin* (one who renounces the world) is not the only noticeable feature in the life and teachings of Śrī Caitanya. There was a mission in his life. And

what was it? It has been held by a devoted contemporary poet of Śrī Caitanya that the Lord Himself accepted a human form through infinite compassion for human beings to bestow on them something which was denied to them up till that time and that much-coveted thing is the *charm and beauty of the self-love of God* conceived in an amorous pattern in human analogy. In analysing the condensed expression italicised above, we may first of all mark the word 'self-love of God' which may be discussed first with reference to the divine category and secondly with reference to the human category. To understand the self-love of God in the divine category, we must notice that as a Vaiṣṇava Sect Caitanyaism laid exclusive stress on enjoying, from a little distance as it were, like an humble attendant, the divine sports of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the supranatural abode of Vṛndāvana with the denizens of the divine abode--particularly with the cowherdess Rādhā who may be said to be the best representative, or in a sense the sole representative of these denizens of the divine abode. It has to be marked that when the Vaiṣṇavas of the Caitanya sect speak of this divine abode Vṛndāvana and the love dalliances of Lord Kṛṣṇa with Rādhā, they speak of nothing figuratively—they speak of the whole thing as *real* and *concrete*. But then, what do these dalliances of the Lord with His eternal beloved Rādhā imply? They imply nothing but the selt-love of God which

divides through His own contrivance His own self as the Lover and the Beloved. He, as the Perfect One, possesses within His own self infinite possibility or power of beauty, love and bliss; but how can He realise His self as such unless He creates a second to Him—a mate to Him—a Rādhā who is nothing but an embodiment of the beauty, love and bliss that are implied in the very nature of God? His eternal *Līlā* (sports or love-dalliances) with Rādhā, therefore, implies his eternal process of self-realisation through self-transfiguration. Rādhā serves as a clear looking-glass in which the Lord of bliss finds Himself reflected. As there are infinite ways of this self-realisation, so there are infinite varieties and niceties in the love-dalliances between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. But the significance of divine love, according to the belief of the Bengal Vaiṣṇavas, was a sealed mystery to man, until the Lord incarnated Himself in Śrī Caitanya in whom the self-created dual nature of the Lord as Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā became unified,—he being Kṛṣṇa in his inner self and Rādhā both in his reddish white complexion and his outer behaviour as devotee of Kṛṣṇa with his maddening love for Him. It is for this reason that the whole life-activity of Śrī Caitanya is described as a key-note, unveiling the mystery of divine love. It has been very nicely put by Narahari Sarkār, a contemporary devotee of Śrī Caitanya in one of his songs:—

Had not there been Gaurāṅga (Caitanya).
Oh. what would have happened to us.
How would we have lived our life?
Who would have preached to the world
the sublime mystery of Rādhā—
A limit to the delight of Love?
The best key-note he (Caitanya) was
for entering into the graceful delight
in the solitude of sweet Vṛndāvana;
For whom would it be possible
to enter into the mystery of the practice
of devotion—
Similar to the practice of love by the
maidens of Braja?
Sing, Sing once more in praise of Gaurāṅga
with a sincere heart;
None else do I find to lead us
to the other shore of the ocean of existence.
Oh, how was he born who does not melt away
exclaiming the name of Gaurāṅga!
How did the creator create the heart of
Narahari—
And ah!—with what stone!

As for the significance of the self-love of God in the human plane, it has been held that in all our devotional experiences there is in reality nothing but the trickling of that one divine bliss under specific human conditions. It is, therefore, held that Rādhā as the embodiment of God's infinite potentiality of bliss has a double function

to perform; in the divine category she as the embodiment of love and beauty pleases Kṛṣṇa and in the human category she pleases, in her infinite mercy, the devotees through their blissful devotional experiences. In all our self-resignation to and burning yearnings for God we but really respond to the call of God whose merciful power functions within us as devotion. Now, Śrī Caitanya was a living symbol of this divine love in the human category,—he demonstrated fully by his devotional behaviour to what a high pitch of intensity the yearning of the human soul for the Divine Beloved can rise, and he taught man by his life's example, the path of selfless devotion.

Śrī Caitanya had, therefore, a two-fold mission in his life, viz. letting man into the hitherto sealed mystery of divine love in the supra-natural abode of Vṛndāvana and teaching man on earth the way to divine love. If we are to interpret this two-fold mission of his life historically against the background of the other devotional movements of India, we come to the conclusion that Caitanya-ism has its novelty in two respects; first it evolved a theology of its own, and secondly it chalked out a new path of devotion. As for the theology we find that it evolved in close contact with the evolution of the Kṛṣṇa-cult with an exclusive stress on the conception of the divine Sports—particularly the dalliances of Kṛṣṇa with the cowherd-girl Rādhā. This Rādhā-element in the divine

Sports had a peculiar development in Bengal. Traces of Rādhā are no doubt found here and there from a fairly early period as literary fragments both in Sanskrit and Prakrit; but the religious attitude of enjoying the love-dalliances of the eternal couple from a little distance as a humble attendant seems to have developed luxuriantly in Bengal, and this religious approach to Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa love-poetry is sufficiently demonstrated in the exquisite lyric poem *Gīta-govinda* of Jayadeva of the twelfth century. The love-episodes of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa had variegated ramifications in the poetry of Vidyāpati and Caṇḍīdās (perhaps of the fourteenth century), and the poetic attitude, if not the religious attitude, of both these poets was exactly the same as that of their predecessor Jayadeva. This current—poetical or religious—or perhaps a happy blending of the two—came down to Śrī Caitanya as a tremendous religious inspiration and the whole thing acquired a new meaning in the light of the devotional behaviour and the ecstatic experiences of Śrī Caitanya; his learned disciples in their turn derived inspiration from the master, and evolved an elaborate theological system within which all the legends of the love-making of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa would find their fit place.

From the side of practical religious approach Caitanyaism enjoins the chanting of the name of the Lord individually or in a congregation. For

the advanced initiates, in addition to such chanting of the name or singing aloud in praise of the Lord, it lays stress on an extremely emotional approach—the approach of a maid. But this maid must not place herself in the position of a lover with her yearning for union with her beloved—the Lord; she on the other hand should feel herself in the position of a female attendant to the Divine Pair and try to serve them with her whole being—by her daily services towards the deity, her worship, chanting, singing and by all her meditation on the *Līlā* (Sports) of the Divine Pair. This makes the practical approach of Caitanyaism sharply distinct from the other devotional sects of India. No school of Vaiṣṇavism would lay such a stress on the emotional approach to the exclusion of all other canons, practices, rites and ceremonies. Of course, later on Caitanyaism also developed a good deal of ritual paraphernalia, but the highest ideal deprecates them all—neither are they considered necessary as accessories for developing the highest emotional aptitude.

In the matter of this emotional approach a precedent may be cited in the emotional approach of the Alvars, the Draviḍa Saints of the Deccan, of an early period. But the approach of the Caitanyaites differs substantially from that of the Alvars in this, that the Alvars would in their ecstasy of love place themselves in the position of a maid directly longing for union with the Lord;

but to long for a direct union with the Lord Himself is considered almost sacrilegious on the part of a man by the Caitanyaites, their only ambition being to enjoy and sing in praise of the sports of the Lord with His eternal counterpart Rādhā or other denizens of Vṛndāvana. In the case of the Alvars even where we find any of them placing himself in the position of a female attendant to a love-lorn maid, the female attendant represents the disciple while the love-lorn maid is the preceptor who passes sleepless nights burning with the pangs of separation from the Beloved Lord. The religious approach of the celebrated Lady Saint Mīrābāī of Rajasthan presents a striking similarity with that of the Alvars who included at least one female Saint, viz., Anḍāl.

Now, as to the causes that led to the widespread popularity of Caitanyaism in and outside Bengal, we may in the first instance refer to the personality of Śrī Caitanya—to his sincerity of purpose. It was not his method to preach by giving instruction; he would teach the truth by practising the truth. As we have said, Śrī Caitanya was regarded by a large number of his contemporary devotees and by his innumerable followers in the later centuries as the perfect incarnation of God manifesting Himself in grace. Whether conceived theologically as the unification of the principles of Rādhā and Kṛṣna or commonly as God, the belief in the Godhead of Śrī Caitanya has

indeed been widespread, particularly in Bengal and Orissa. But this emphasis on the Godhead of Śrī Caitanya has been the reason why, as we think, the greatness of the apostle as a man has not received the emphasis and appreciation it deserves. Without questioning the divinity of Śrī Caitanya we venture to say that humanity had also a noticeable development in him.

One who studies the character of Śrī Caitanya as a man through the number of Sanskrit and Bengali biographies available, is sure to be struck by his unshaken adherence to the strict laws of discipline and his fierce attachment to the cardinal principles of the life of an ascetic. It is customary in some quarters to think of Śrī Caitanya as a loose type of Sannyāsin always absorbed in his easily excitable emotional exuberance; but without gainsaying this emotional nature of the man (of which he himself was fully conscious as will be apparent from the fact that he often described himself as a madman), we may say that he was sagacious even as a religious organiser. To give a brief illustration of this sagacity it may be pointed out that in spite of knowing the fact that they were great devotees he did not entrust apostles like Rūpa Gosvāmī, Sanātana Gosvāmī, Raghunāth Dās Gosvāmī and others with the task of popularising his new mode of religious endeavour (viz., the singing of the name of Lord in congregation) among the masses of Bengal ; he on the other

hand inspired these devotees, who were erudite scholars, with the special mission of working out a philosophy with the doctrines he had preached. On the other hand, we find the task of popularising *Nāma-saṅkīrtana* (the singing of the name of the Lord) was entrusted to householders like Nityānanda, Advaita and Śrīvās. It is to be specially noted that he himself being a Sannyāsin, induced, or rather compelled Nityānanda, a Sannyāsin of the order of wandering mendicants, to give up his career of Sannyāsin, to marry and be a householder just to create confidence in the mind of lay people, who often do not feel the company of a Sannyāsin very congenial to them.

Indeed Śrī Caitanya showed cautious sanity in allocating different kinds of missionary duties to his large band of followers who naturally possessed different tastes, temperaments, aptitudes and abilities. Nityānanda who was respected by Śrī Caitanya himself as his elder brother, and who was a man of infinite patience and tolerance and had a peculiar knack of contacting the masses, was deputed by the master, along with other leaders like Advaitācārya and Śrīvās, to induce all, irrespective of caste and creed, to chant the name of the Lord and Saviour. Again, among the followers whom he could draw very close to him by his charming personality and sincerity of purpose there were a few scholars of outstanding merit who were blessed with the rare power of

combining high intellectual ability with subtle emotional responses, they were instructed by the master and placed in Vṛndāvana where they practically formed a school of their own and produced a large number of works, philosophical, theological and literary This school, primarily formed by the well-known six *Gosvāmins* of Vṛndāvana in the sixteenth century, was followed by a band of worthy successors who developed these ideas further in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

It is again, very interesting and profitable to study Śrī Caitanya's character as a strict disciplinarian in his religious life. Śrī Caitanya discouraged the idea that might have gained some strength in the minds of many of his followers that the easy way to attain God is to renounce the career of a householder and to become a Sannyāsin all of a sudden. He took sufficient precautions also against the illusion that might have prevailed among a section of his followers that indulging in emotional exuberance would be something like a short-cut in the religious life. He felt sure that emotionalism in the religious field must be cultivated against a clear background of strict discipline and the career of a mendicant must not be resorted to unless and until worldly attachment is really and totally gone and there is an irresistible urge to sacrifice all worldly pleasure for the sake of attaining supreme divine bliss.

This attitude of Śrī Caitanya has been well exemplified in the treatment that was meted cut by him to Raghunāth Dās. When Raghunāth, a young man of tender age and only heir of a very rich family, first fled from his house and joined the party of Śrī Caitanya he was rather coldly received by the master who advised him rather harshly not to be a hypocrite by renouncing the world of pleasure just to make a great show of it; 'It is better,' he said, 'to enjoy objects of pleasure properly without having any attachment for the same'. As a matter of fact, Raghunāth was sent back to his home. But Raghunāth had a real urge within and could not but come to Śrī Ḉaitanya once more. This time the master was convinced of his (Raghunāth's) honesty of purpose and therefore did not try to send him back, but put him in the custody of the veteran Vaiṣṇava Svarūpa Dāmodara under whose guidance and vigilance Raghunāth was leading an ascetic life. As we have said before, Raghunāth was the only heir of a very rich family; when he was leading this life of an ascetic at Purī a batch of attendants including a cook, and two servants with a good amount of money was sent to Purī by his parents under the supervision of the elderly Vaiṣṇava savant Śivānanda Sen; but Raghunāth would not accept their assistance in any way and maintained himself by begging food at the gate of the Jagannāth temple, failing

which he fasted. He took some help from the party but that was only to feed Śrī Caitanya for some time; but even in that he was feeling constrained and soon he gave up the practice. So very indifferent did he become to all worldly affairs that even the idea of begging food for self-maintenance became repulsive to him,—he better devoted the whole of the time, day and night to the uttering of the name of God; born a prince, he came ultimately to maintain that a sincere devotee should never think of himself—how he should eat and what he should wear—he must depend on God and God alone for the daily necessities of life.

A very small incident of his life tells us how strictly Śrī Caitanya adhered to this cardinal principle of self-abnegation. Śrī Caitanya was on pilgrimage; at one place he took his full meal and was feeling inclined to chew something and asked his attendant Govinda to see if it was possible for him to procure something for the purpose. Govinda went out and somehow managed to procure a dried *Harītakī* fruit. The master was glad to have it and thanked Govinda. The following day the master again asked something of Govinda for chewing and Govinda readily offered a portion of the *Harītakī*. The master asked,—'How is it Govinda that you take no time to procure it to-day?' Govinda replied,—'The other day I procured the *Harītakī*, I gave you a half of it that day,

preserving the other half for the next occasion, that remaining half has been supplied to you.' The reply made the ascetic grave and his gravity soon transformed itself into sternness—and Śrī Caitanya said—'You see Govinda, you have not yet been able to do away with your habit of preserving things for your use in time of necessity; that shows you have no faith in God; a man who has no faith in God, and thinks of himself—for his own future necessities—is not a fit person to accompany me,—you must therefore leave my company at once.' No plea or entreaty was of any avail and the attendant had to leave the company of the master.

So far as the fundamental principles were concerned, Śrī Caitanya would never budge an inch to accommodate any compromise. As it is against the principle of an ascetic to get himself entangled with money matters Śrī Caitanya would never allow himself to be associated with talk of money even in an indirect way. We may refer here to the episode of Gopīnāth Paṭṭanāyak as illustrative of the fact. Gopīnāth was the son of Bhavānanda Rāy who, with the whole of his family, was profoundly devoted to Śrī Caitanya. This Gopīnāth was in charge of a big village under the king Pratāparudra of Orissa and Gopīnāth was to pay the king an amount of revenue annually. There was the default of a big sum for which Gopīnāth was going to pay the extreme penalty of being

executed. Now as Gopīnāth was a favourite devotee of Śrī Caitanya, so was the king Pratāparudra. Naturally therefore some of the followers of Śrī Caitanya rushed to him to inform that Gopīnāth was being executed by the men of the king, their idea being that Gopīnāth might be saved if only the master exerted on the king even some indirect influence. But Śrī Caitanya remained unperturbed and quietly replied that the man who was actually guilty of non-payment of the revenue should be executed. Then another man rushed in to inform him that the men of the king had taken many of the members of Gopīnāth's family as captives; the prominent followers of Śrī Caitanya urged upon him to do something to save the devoted family; but at this the ascetic flared up, he sternly refused to be dragged into the matter and ask of the king for any concession in money on behalf of anybody, however dear he or his family might have been to him and however devoted the king himself might be. He said plainly—'A beggar am I, nothing can you expect of me concerning money matters; if, however, you are eager to save anybody you may just go to the temple of Jagannāth and pray to the Lord who is the only Saviour.' And as a matter of fact the man was saved that time through the grace of God. But when afterwards Śrī Caitanya felt that he was being implicated in the matter indirectly, he expressed his desire to leave the place

altogether, but when this became known to the king everything settled down easily without the master being implicated in the matter in any way.

An extreme case of rigorism is found in the treatment that was meted out by Śrī Caitanya to Haridās, the junior, popularly known as *Choṭa-Haridās*. It is, however, true that taking advantage of the fact that Śrī Caitanya advocated a method of emotional approach in religious pursuits, looseness of various types did actually make its appearance in Bengal Vaiṣṇavism during the centuries that followed the advent of the master. But the story of Haridās, the junior, illustrates how strict he was, so far as the question of sex-relation was concerned. We have hinted above that Śrī Caitanya bore no hatred against married life as will be evinced by the fact that he himself induced Nityānanda to give up his celibate career as a wandering mendicant and to marry and be a householder. Most of his noted and contemporary followers in Bengal were householders. But it was his principle that, once a man resorts to the life of an ascetic he must be rigorously strict in his behaviour so far as the other sex is concerned. Haridās, the junior, was a young celibate entertaining Śrī Caitanya by his sweet songs in which he excelled, and Śrī Caitanya himself was very fond of listening to the songs of Haridās. One day Haridās begged a quantity of rice from

an old widow, named Mādhavī Devī, for some sweet delicacy to be prepared for Śrī Caitanya. When Śrī Caitanya came to know of it on some query he at once ordered Haridās not to come within his sight any more. Mādhavī Devī was herself a very devout Vaiṣṇava, first in rank among the women devotees and fourth among all the devotees of Śrī Caitanya; yet he did not pardon Haridās and took a very stern attitude so that no bad example might have been set. The veteran Vaiṣṇavas of Purī pleaded humbly for Haridās and pointed out that very heavy was the punishment in comparison with the crime; but nothing was of any avail. Haridās waited patiently for one year, but Śrī Caitanya remained adamant and would not relax the terms of punishment. Being sure not to have any mercy from the master Haridās left Purī for Prayāga and there drowned himself at the confluence of the three rivers (the Gaṅgā, the Yamunā and the Sarasvatī). It is reported by the biographers that after drowning himself Haridās returned to Purī in a purified divine body and sang songs to Śrī Caitanya when he was all alone in the sea-shore. The followers of Śrī Caitanya also had occasion to listen to the ethereal voice of Haridās singing in praise of Lord Śrī Caitanya and in their bewilderment they found Śrī Caitanya more attracted to the songs sung by Haridās. Śrī Caitanya bore no malice against Haridās—his love

for Haridās did not diminish in the least; yet he would not connive at the fault committed by a young devotee.

We have referred here to some of the incidents in the life-history of Śrī Caitanya. This will give us an idea of Śrī Caitanya not merely as the 'Man-God' but also as the 'man-ascetic'. God incarnate, we should remember, is never the negation of the Man. God is rather the fulfilment of the Man. If the greatness of the Man is overshadowed altogether by the divine halo something substantial becomes lost to humanity; the divine halo, instead of shadowing the human greatness, should, we think, glorify the Man himself.

We were discussing the causes for the wide popularity of Caitanyaism as a religion, and in discussing that the character and personality of Śrī Caitanya are held by us as of primary importance. We may note in this connection that Śrī Caitanya himself travelled long in different parts of India and that on foot. Besides Bengal, which was his native province and where he passed the first twenty-four years of his life, he passed long eighteen years of saintly life in Orissa. He travelled extensively in South India and North India preaching his new creed. Vṛndāvana, the greatest centre of Vaiṣṇavism in North India was practically restored to its pristine glory, with all the shrines of Rādha-Kṛṣṇa and other sacred places where Kṛṣṇa is believed to have had

his sports, practically through the efforts and inspiration of Caitanya and his followers.

Again a noticeable point is that, because of the essentially emotional approach, Caitanyaism as a whole possessed a strong aesthetic appeal, resulting perhaps from an unconscious assimilation of the religious sentiment and the poetic sentiment. This also attracted a large number of poets round the divine man and the inspiration derived from him served as a strong incentive for the luxuriant growth of poetry, both lyrical and biographical. The lyrical poems that were composed were not meant to be read, they were to be sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments and in the midst of a large congregation. These songs could spread the spirit of Caitanyaism throughout the length and breadth of the country much more easily and quickly than any other missionary activities, and these songs could catch the popular imagination more profoundly than any amount of sermonising.

There are several other reasons why Caitanyaism could make itself readily acceptable to a large number of the masses of Bengal in spite of the staunch opposition offered by the Brahmanical section of the society, by a section of the adherents of prevalent religious rites and ceremonies growing round some local gods and goddesses, and also by the ruling Muslims. In the first place we may notice that in the age when Caitanya

flourished the whole national life was passing through a state of political uncertainty and demoralisation. The inevitable result was depression and despair. The blow, consequent on the Muslim conquest, was felt more in the upper stratum of the society than the lower one and so Brahmanism became lifeless, a formal fight against odds. The indigenous religious worship of gods and goddesses and the rites and ceremonies associated with them were more repulsive than attractive. Navadvīp as the cultural centre of the province of Bengal of the time was busy with grammar, logic and jurisprudence. Under these circumstances the advent of Śrī Caitanya as an embodiment of living faith in God was naturally hailed by the masses if not at first by the Brahmanic element of the country and a section of the corrupted element of the society. Again, we have to take account of the fact that Bengal was never a stronghold of the Vedic sacrificial religion, and it is very easy to see that at a late period like the sixteenth century the paraphernalia of the Vedic sacrifices had little charm for the masses of Bengal; the other indigenous religious practices were no substitute for it; when at such a psychological moment Śrī Caitanya came forward and replaced the old type of Vedic sacrifice by a new type of sacrifice —a sacrifice in the form of chanting the sweet name of the Lord and Saviour, a large section of the masses responded readily and accepted it with

a rejuvenated fervour. It is generally said by the Vaiṣṇavas that this *Kali* age of ours is not fit for Vedic sacrifices and other Vedic rites and rituals; but a novel type of sacrifice was discovered by Śrī Caitanya for the liberation of the people of the Kali age and that is the best type of sacrifice for all the ages to come and this is the sacrifice of chanting God's name. It may not be out of place to mention here that congregational dancing and singing to the accompaniment of various musical instruments is a very popular pastime with the toiling masses of every land; when the whole thing is transformed into a deeply religious process, it suits the taste and temperament of the people congenially.

Again it may be observed that the mediæval period of the history of Indian religion (we mean the period roughly between the eleventh and the sixteenth centuries) was marked by a cross current of pronounced heterodoxy—a spirit of strong protest against the rigid caste-system and all sorts of sectarianism—a spirit of scathing criticism against much reading of the scriptures and indulging in dry logical controversies—a spirit of condemnation of the elaborate paraphernalia of religious practices and ceremonies. This cross current was as strong in the soil of Bengal as in the other parts of India—particularly in Western and Northern India. When Śrī Caitanya came forward with his clarion call of love—love for God

as well as for all men irrespective of caste and creed,—with his pronounced condemnation of speculative dissertations—the paraphernalia of orthodox religious ceremonies—the masses of Bengal found in him not only a spiritual guide but a staunch leader who could mobilise the opinion of the masses and direct them to a proper channel. It was, therefore, in the very fitness of things that the life and preachings of Śrī Caitanya would have a lightning effect on the people of Bengal and outside and bring about a revolutionary change in the religious, social and cultural spheres.

THE BIRTH-DAY CELEBRATION OF ŚRĪ-KṚṢṆA

There is a significant verse in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa where the author describes with philosophic insight how Śrī-Kṛṣṇa was viewed by the people of the assembly, representing different tastes, temperaments and aptitudes, when Śrī-Kṛṣṇa, accompanied by his elder brother Balarām, stood on the stage challenging Kaṃsa, the foremost of the devilish ones, to a single combat. To us it seems, this description of Śrī-Kṛṣṇa holds good, and very aptly too, even to-day having regard to the vast assembly of the people of India, representing colourful diversities of social, religious and cultural differences on the one hand and of tastes, temperaments and aptitudes on the other. To millions of people he is still to-day the Lord Supreme, whose image must be installed and worshipped in temples, to whom one must surrender oneself unconditionally for a particle of His grace, which is believed to be the only support in the spiritual march, and whose almighty 'Name' is to be muttered within, and chanted aloud whenever and wherever one can : again to religious aspirers of a higher order he is the eternal principle of love and beauty, incarnating himself as such in grace, who enjoys His eter-

nal sports in the supra-natural abode of Vṛndāvana in and through His love-dalliances with the cowherd girls, and particularly with Rādhā ; to others again, with a humanistic leaning even in the religious sphere, Śrī-Kṛṣṇa is the ideal person —the *Puruṣottama*—in whom there has been a harmonious development of all the finer and higher qualities of man—leading to a state of perfection—an end to which humanity can look forward as the supreme ideal to be attained; to people with an aesthetic leaning Kṛṣṇa serves as the never-failing source of aesthetic inspiration either in enjoying the huge mass of Kṛṣṇa songs that have cropped up luxuriantly not only in Sanskrit but in all the modern Indian languages, or in composing new songs and poems; historians on the other hand are straining their brain over the possibility of some Kṛṣṇa, son of Devakī of the Upaniṣadic period, having something to do with the later Kṛṣṇa of Vaiṣṇavism, or the 'boy-god' brought with them by the nomadic Ābhīras of ancient India with all the pastoral songs and legends of exploits and love-making. The picture will be complete we think, if one adds to all these the attitude of some of the foreign missionaries in India, particularly during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, who discovered in Śrī-Kṛṣṇa a peculiar personality emerging out of a mesh of sophisticated myths, who side by side with his fictitious exploits with the demons, indulged in

unconventional love-making verging often upon debauchery.

The above is a prelude just to pointing out that the birth-day ceremony of Śrī-Kṛṣṇa which comes off every year on the eighth day of the black fortnight in the month of Bhādra (Śrāvaṇa according to a different version), and which is widely observed in most parts of India as a religious ceremony of deep significance, may be viewed differently from different angles of vision. Those who believe in the historical personality of Kṛṣṇa celebrate the occasion as marking the actual moment of his birth on earth in the corporeal form. Others there are who would attach more significance to the birth of Śrī Kṛṣṇa within the heart of devotees in their renewed realisation of the divinity within, in their deepening of the God-consciousness in such a way as to feel the existence of God within in a tangible form. It is a renewed attempt at perceiving the living presence of God within by actually feeling how He is actively existent in one's own self in and through one's being doing and thinking. Ordinary people would celebrate the occasion by fasting, worshipping the deity, pouring libations to forefathers and presenting offerings also to the moon. But as we have said, as there is the spiritual way of approaching the occasion, and also the ordinary religious way—there may still be another approach, a historical one, which though ap-

parently at variance with the religious one, may not prove to be so ultimately.

Approaching the occasion historically, it has struck us that Janmāṣṭamī (as the birth-day ceremony of Śrī-Kṛṣṇa is popularly known) might have originally been a ceremony of infant-worship. Such customs of infant-worship are not altogether unknown to the history of mankind as will be corroborated by the well-known story of the wise men coming from the east to Jerusalem to worship the new-born child Jesus Christ for 'they saw his star in the east'! Some have even gone to the length of suggesting that this ceremony of Janmāṣṭamī had been borrowed by the Indians from the early Christians, who believed in the infant-god and its worship; but that remains a wishful theory without having anything convincing in it. It is to be noticed that this belief in the infant-god is a very strong factor in the Vaiṣṇavism of India, particularly in the Kṛṣṇa-cult. Some scholars are disposed to believe that the Kṛṣṇa-cult originally started with the worship of Bāla-Kṛṣṇa, or the Boy-Kṛṣṇa. This worship of Boy-Kṛṣṇa is still the dominant feature of some of the Vaiṣṇava sects of India and the orthodox Vaiṣṇavas in general and those of Bengal in particular would never allow Śrī-Kṛṣṇa to cross the prime of his youth (*i.e.* the fifteenth year). This fact of course conveys a deep theological significance, but its histori-

cal importance may not altogether be brushed aside.

The actual observance of Janmāṣṭamī as a religious ceremony differs in different parts of India, some local elements having been introduced in course of time. As for instance, there is an abundance of palm-fruits in Bengal at this time and feasting on the delicacies prepared from them has naturally been associated with this religious occasion. But apart from these later additions, there are other factors which require cautious analysis to be properly understood in the context. The first thing which we may notice is that Janmāṣṭamī is well known in many parts of India as a religious vow (*vrata*) enjoining fasting, waking throughout the night, pouring libations to forefathers and presenting offerings to the moon. A general glance at the nature of these accessories may tempt one to doubt if all of them are directly or necessarily associated with the birth-ceremony of Śrī-Kṛṣṇa. In some of the Purāṇas we find that Kṛṣṇa was born on the night of the eighth day of the black fortnight when Rohiṇī was the star; now this particular part of the night with the particular combination of the star and the part of the lunation is also called Jayanti. The eighth part of the lunation of the black fortnight of the next month is also important as being auspicious and religiously significant. Can it then be suggested with any

amount of plausibility that the occasion was an occasion of an independent religious ceremony which became associated with the birth ceremony of Kṛṣṇa during the growth of the Kṛṣṇa-cult in India? The Kṛṣṇa-legends have been explained by some scholars as developing originally from some astronomical phenomena,—Kṛṣṇa as the incarnation of Viṣṇu being interpreted as the reflection of the sun (the well-known Viṣṇu-god of the Vedic period) on the moon and on some of the prominent stars. Can some astronomical truth be discovered for the association of the birth of this Kṛṣṇa with the eighth lunar part of the black fortnight of the month of Bhādra with the Rohiṇī star in the sky? We admit apologetically that ours is but a tentative suggestion, and not the postulation of a new theory. But the question may pertinently be put why we should indulge in such speculations at all. The reply is that if we analyse the legendary life-history of Śrī-Kṛṣṇa we shall find that many of the well-known ceremonies and festivals of India, which were originally independent of the Kṛṣṇa-cult, have in course of time became associated with the Kṛṣṇa-legend. To mention a few instances, we may speak of the swinging festival (*jhulan*), the festival of the autumnal dance (*rāsa-nṛtya*), and the well-known spring festival of the *Holi*. That these are all ancient Indian festivals which later on became inseparably associated with the

legends of the love-dalliances of Kṛṣṇa will be admitted without any note of dissension from any quarter. It may not be wide of the mark to point out in this connection that all the later ramifications of the Kṛṣṇa-legend, particularly in Northern and Eastern India, show the same tendency to incorporate the special occasion of the national life and special situations of the social life with the variegated sportive life of Śrī-Kṛṣṇa.

This tendency, we beg to add, is not without its justification as it has a deep religious significance. A national deity is as much a manifestation in the corporeal form of the eternally existent spiritual truth as he is the creation of the whole nation herself. The deity emerges out of the evolution of the whole national life as an embodiment of the higher value-sense of the people. The value-sense of a nation as a whole, representing people of divergent elements, must represent a complex texture, and hence comes about the complex character of the national deity. There is always the tendency to associate the ceremonies and festivities of the national life with the national deity under an innate urge to having them glorified and exalted by the touch of the divinity. *Holi*, as we all know, is the spring festival associated originally with *Madana*, the Indian god of passion; but why should there be a sharp line of demarcation between humanity and divinity and why should we allow our physical life

to roll on totally divorced from the spiritual one? We have therefore tried to bring in the play of the divinity even where there was the play of our passions. We have thereby given our passions a chance to be exalted and transformed—and this transformation of the passions by concentrating them on the divinity is a key-note of the Vaiṣṇavism that India preaches. The lower self has to be transformed and transubstantiated by coming in contact with the touch-stone of divinity.

The above will give us a clue as to how the historical approach to the observance of Janmāṣṭamī need not ultimately lead us to a position which would be at variance with our idea of spirituality. Even if it is admitted, as we have suggested, that Janmāṣṭamī represents originally the worship of the Boy-god, the occasion will not be in any way without a deeply spiritual significance. Maybe, we have felt that one of the most pleasing events of our life is the occasion of the birth of a son, and maybe, we have discovered in the newly born baby the dearest one of our life—but at the same time we have felt limitations—limitations in the realisation of pleasure, in our love and affection in the object of our love. This sense of limitation all around is a challenge to our higher aspirations: we therefore try to break down the barrier—we try to transcend the limits of finitude within the temporal evolution and put ourselves in touch with infinity in the life eter-

nal. This our desire to put ourselves in touch with infinity in and through the boy leads to the deification of our boy who becomes ultimately the Boy-god. Not that each and every individual of the society does so consciously; he receives the tradition just as a social heritage; but when he celebrates the birth-anniversary of Kṛṣṇa—an eternal Boy-god—he may have the chance of having a glimpse, in whatever crude form it may be, of an eternal and universal boyhood and there must always be a higher kind of pleasure—an elevation of the mind in this passing from the particular to the universal. Will it be far from the truth to say that the idea of Bāla-Gopāla (Kṛṣṇa as the boy-cowherd) in Vaiṣṇavism evolved from this idea of the eternal and universal boyhood which is always hallowed with a mysterious charm and which puts an irresistible demand on the whole of our affection?

The Vaiṣṇava literature of Northern and Eastern India abounds with songs on the boyhood of Kṛṣṇa. If we scrutinise these songs we shall be struck by the way in which the Vaiṣṇava poets of India have very easily and nicely bridged the gulf between the worldly and the divine. In these songs Kṛṣṇa and his mother Yaśodā have everything in them that a human child and a mother may have—but without denying the human element, and rather as a fulfilment of it, there is something more, and this something more

is really the 'surplus in man'—it is the divine in man—which makes it possible for the divine abode of Vṛndāvana to come down to earth.

Let us resort to some illustrations. Mother Yaśodā, wife of the cowherd Nanda, kept all her milk, curd and butter in earthern pots hidden from her notorious child Kṛṣṇa--but all her plans were frustrated by the child who not only discovered the hidden treasure and made the best use of it, but in doing so broke all the earthen pots and spoiled everything. This was obviously too much for the mother. Then—"The queen of the cowherd Nanda stretches out her arms and goes forward, but the child of the hue of a blue gem escapes her even when it appears he must be caught. Curd and butter are rolling on the floor, and the queen looks all around with angry eyes. 'O thou thief, thou stealer of butter',—exclaims the mother as she rushes to catch him, but Gopāla (the boy-cowherd) hides himself in this house and that. Stick in hand the queen of Nanda pursues him stubbornly, and lo, the Lord of the universe flees timidly! The saviour whom none can frighten in all the three worlds, flees timidly away in fear of the mother! Gopāla somehow escapes the mother and manages to flee away from her, but lo, the mother grows restless without seeing her Gopāla! She searches for him in all the houses of Gokula and then exclaims,—My heart aches for the sight of you, my darling ; just call out and

let me know where you are, take care, your mother's heart is being broken into pieces. Then Śrīdām (a play-mate of Kṛṣṇa) shouts to say, Kṛṣṇa is here in our house, the dearest darling of all has hidden himself, being afraid of the mother. Ghanarām Dās (the Bengalee poet) says—'Keep quiet my mother; Gopāla surrenders himself to love—you are sure to meet him soon.' "

We are introducing another scene from the life-drama of Boy-Kṛṣṇa. Tiny cowherd boys—all play-mates of Boy-Kṛṣṇa come in the morning to queen Yaśodā with all their cows and calves and ask for the permission of the mother to have Boy-Kṛṣṇa in their midst in tending cows in the pasture field. The mother stoutly refuses the proposal on the ground that Boy-Kṛṣṇa is still too young to go to the field every day to tend the cows. "But then mother, you see with your own eyes that even the cows and the calves would not go to the field unless they hear the sweet sound from the flute of Kṛṣṇa." The argument is unassailable and however reluctantly the mother has to agree to the proposal of the boys. She then serves the darling his breakfast, dresses him elaborately and tenderly and before allowing him to go with the boys says—"Swear by me, my blue-gem, the heart of my heart, you must not go in front of the cows; tend the cows in a nearby field, and fill your sweet flute often with music so that I may listen to it even from my house. Balāi

(Balarām, the oldest of them all) must be in the forefront, others must be by the left, Śrīdām and Sudām should be in the rear; you must be in the middle and never left behind—for many are the evils in the field. Whenever you are hungry ask for some food; tread the track very cautiously, for it is full of thorns; under nobody's dictates or on nobody's request should you venture to tend a big cow—and for that you must swear by my head. It is the importunate request of a mother, you must take shelter under the shadow of a tree to avoid the rays of the sun." Yādavendra (the poet) makes the request, 'Keep me in your company and keep your shoes with me, I shall supply them just when you require."

These are some of the specimens of songs that the Vaiṣṇava poets have sung of the Boy-god. These are pictures with which we are well acquainted in our everyday life in every family of ours. Who can say with any amount of certitude whether the divine has been depicted here in the analogy of man, or has expressed itself through the charm and beauty of the child and its all-attractive plays and freaks and pranks. The two alternatives may very well be the two aspects of the same truth, the divine playing through the man—the eternal through the temporal.

The village poets of Bengal belonging to the Vaiṣṇava sect may still be heard singing the song —"Still to-day, the darling of Nanda dances in

the outskirt of Yaśodā's hut, but alas, who is to recognise him?" There are then the worldly father and the mother and the worldly son on the one hand, and the divine father and the mother and the divine son in Vṛndāvana. What then makes the real difference between the two? It has been said in reply that while the one is *Prākṛta* or mundane, the other is *Aprākṛta* or supra-mundane. That is, the one is with all its limitations and defilements while the other transcends all limitations and defilement. But can't we have a peep into the divine Līlā (sports) if we try to purify ourselves to the extent of removing all these limitations and defilements? Is it not possible just to have a glimpse of Nanda-Yośodā and the Boy-god Kṛṣṇa even in our family life?

'Yes, it is possible," would say the Vaiṣṇava poet; "eternal is the Boy-cowherd (Bāla-Gopāla) and eternal are his sports; but only he can see it who has the eyes to see it, only he may understand it who has the heart to understand." To a real devotee, therefore, Janmāṣṭamī and such other occasions pertaining to the boyhood of Kṛṣṇa are occasions to prepare, by processes of purification, the eyes and the ears and the mind in such a way as may make it possible for him to visualise and enjoy the divine sports in the unmanifested abode of Vṛndāvana as also to visualise the coming down of Vṛndāvana to earth where the divine plays in and through the man.

A PHASE OF VAIṢṆAVA PHILOSOPHY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Mahātmā Sisir Kumar Ghosh, the renowned Vaiṣṇava apostle of Bengal, wrote towards the end of the nineteenth century a book of poems divided into several chapters, entitled *Śrī Kālā-cānd Gītā*. Shorn of all sorts of ornamentation both in metre and diction, the text is a spontaneous flow from the core of the heart of a devout Vaiṣṇava, and as such it has no pretensions to be a work of art or philosophy; but to a careful reader the text is strikingly attractive for a special feature of its own, that being the attempt at establishing the fundamentals of Vaiṣṇava faith and philosophy on an empirical basis. The motive-force of the book is devotion in the form of passionate yearning of the human soul for the divine beloved: but to make the flow of devotion unruffled, hundreds of queries have to be solved. The author has raised these questions in different contexts, but has not tried to silence the reader by offering ready-made answers from the recognised scriptures or by referring to the views of the well-known Vaiṣṇava philosophers of the past in Bengal and outside Bengal: he has, on the other

hand, tried to answer these questions with reference to the experience of man in his domestic and social life. The old Vaiṣṇava Philosophers accepted the sayings of the scriptures, particularly those of the well-known Upaniṣads, as undisputed and indisputable and established their system of philosophy by way of interpreting the scriptures. The traditional aphorisms known as the *Brahma-sūtras* served as the basis of the philosophy of the renowned Vaiṣṇava philosophers like Rāmānuja, Madhva. Nimbārka and Vallabha. Bengal Vaiṣṇavism of the sixteenth century is based primarily on some of the well-known Purāṇas, particularly the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, besides the sayings of the Upaniṣads. Commentaries and interpretations mark the philosophical approach of the Vaiṣṇava philosophers in general. But Mahātmā Sisir Kumar chalked out a different approach ; the conclusions arrived at by the older Vaiṣṇavas through interpretation and argument were explained by Sisir Kumar in a very simple way, characteristic of his own nature, with reference to the day-to-day experiences of man even in his ordinary life. In this fresh and bold attempt the author shows originality both in intuition and intellect, deserving a close and careful study. As devotion, and not philosophy, is the primary concern of the author, the philosophical fragments lie scattered throughout the body of the text and often in a cryptic form; they have to be culled and read in all their

suggestive import before they can be accepted as presenting a philosophic view.

To begin with, we see that the author has no repulsion for or prejudice against scepticism. As a Vaiṣṇava to the very core of his heart he believed that God as the embodiment of infinite love dwells in the heart of every being, and yet man either denies His existence categorically or hesitates and vacillates in accepting the truth of His existence. The author would not condemn the sceptics with a curse—but would interpret this spirit of scepticism as the salt of true love. In one place God says to His devotee (who is depicted as a maiden passionately in love with her beloved)—"Hearken my darling, I tell you this rare secret,—does union overflow with joy if one knows beforehand that all the desires will be satisfied ? Doubt only intensifies love, doubt is the rare wealth of man. Had there not been this doubtful apprehension of separation, would this life on earth be fresh and enjoyable? You are now with me in deep embrace, still I know, you shed many a tear." In this context doubt and distrust in man may be explained as a device of God Himself in His eternal sports of love-dalliances and this device refreshes and rejuvenates love at every step. From the side of man, doubt and distrust ultimately intensify man's yearning for union with God and make this union all the more attractive and enjoyable.

Doubt and distrust and the resulting scepticism may be said to be a sure sign of a man's spiritual progress. A so-called believer lacks that maddening passion which serves as a dynamic force in a man's spiritual progress to blissful communion with God,— scepticism that precedes belief adds passion to love and makes religion not a make-believe, but a stirring truth in life.

Philosophers have advocated various proofs for the existence of God with the help of discursive reason; but Sisir Kumar makes the startling assertion that the very mental constitution of man makes the existence of God objectively and imperatively real. The best proof of the existence of God is,—"My mind weeps for you, my God, and by that I have been convinced that you must exist as 'Some One'." The cogency of the argument lies in the fact that an analysis of the normal psychology of man reveals that man in all countries and in all ages longs for a supreme personal being with whom it is possible to have communion and personal relationship. This eternal and universal subjective phenomenon cannot hang in the infinite vacuum of nothingness like an unattached cord; our rational nature itself demands some *raison d'être* for this subjective phenomenon and God stands as the objective fulfilment of that subjective demand. In other words, it may be said that the idea of God is an innate idea in man. But then why should man have such an

innate idea at all? It may be said in the words of the well-known philosopher, Descartes, that our rational nature demands a 'guarantee' for this innate idea of ours and God as a Being alone stands as a 'guarantee' for such an idea. In the same strain the author argues that a further analysis of the mind of man reveals that he has a strong desire for eternal life; this desire itself is an argument for the truth of a life hereafter. Had not there been the possibility of that after-life man would not have this innate urge for a long and continued life at all. As it has been nicely put by the author, "All beings have the desire in mind to live eternally; that desire itself is the guarantee to man of life eternal." And the author further says that all beings are knit together through a bond of love, and that this universal principle of love is the guarantee of man's ultimate union with an infinite beloved. It has to be admitted on universal empirical analysis that love is the dynamic force in the life of man in whatever form it shows itself. The individual grows in and through love, the domestic life is an outcome of the knitting together of individuals in love; the individual becomes extended in the society in love and life grows wider and wider through the ever-widening urge of the inherent life-force, which is love. He cannot think of this ever-widening urge of love stopping at any stage of our life. Where can it then have its fulfilment? It may have its ful-

filment only in a Being as the embodiment of infinite love and bliss; and God as a Being of the nature of pure and infinite love and bliss becomes thus 'necessary,' and this 'necessity' makes Him objectively real.

Even if we admit the existence of God as the ultimate justification of the very psychological nature of man, we may differ as to the true nature of that ultimate Being. The Vaiṣṇavas have always conceived of God as a personal Being and a charge of anthropomorphism has often been levelled against the Vaiṣṇavas for this conception. But Sisir Kumar, admitting all elements of anthropomorphism in the conception of God as a personal Being, stoutly denies it to be a 'charge' at all. He argues that the very fact that God has made man in His own image fully justifies man in conceiving God in his own image. The argument of the author in this direction may be put in his own words,—"A conscious Being must be He Who has created conscious beings like us, and He has bestowed all His merit and demerit on us. How can He bestow on us what is not in Him? So it stands, whatever there is in man must be there in Him (as a possibility). From this argument I conclude, that the Lord of the world must be of the nature of man." He may have—and He must have—his surplus nature as the creator not only of man or his world, but as the creator of the whole cosmos. So the author

humbly admits—"He Who has created also the world of not-man must be something more than man," but that does not in any way preclude God from possessing human nature. He may possess in His nature many things much more than human nature, but there is no denying the fact that "He must be something of the man too." But then we may ask ourselves the relevant question, knowing full well that God as the Creator also of the non-man must be something more than man, why should we think of Him as a personal Being in the image of man? The answer of the author will be as follows. That aspect of the nature of God that transcends the nature of man is obviously not only unknown, but unknowable. Knowledge presupposes homogeneity; 'A' can never know what is 'not-A', for 'not-A' is beyond the scope of its nature. Our knowledge cannot go beyond the bounds of our nature; so the scope of our knowledge is limited within the jurisdiction of man and the universe of man. So the author concludes—"That portion or aspect of God which is beyond man cannot be comprehended by me, for it is not at all comprehensible. Man has not the power to comprehend what is beyond the nature of man. It may be a fact that He possesses what is not in man, but how can man comprehend that in his mind? So I shall select only that aspect of His nature which may be beheld by me within my heart. Taken in

His totality He transcends all knowledge, I am not at all interested in that which is incomprehensible."

The implication seems to be that God becomes meaningless to man as an unprefixed 'x'—standing as the negation of all his human relations. God is significant to man only in so far as He comes closer to him within the bond of human relationship seeking his love and co-operation and fulfilling man through infinite love and bliss. At least, this has been the idea of the Vaiṣṇavas of India, the motive-force of all whose religious endeavours has been to comprehend and enjoy God through the establishment of the most intimate personal relationship. This religious attitude of the author has clearly been demonstrated in the last chapter of the book where, in response to the sincere call of the devotee, God appears before him in His sovereign grandeur. The devotee has the vision before him of something which has neither beginning nor end, which has innumerable forms, crores of mouths and crores of hands—and infinite appears every limb whereon he fixes his eyes Like Arjuna, bewildered at the sight of the cosmic form of the Lord, the devotee is bewildered and frightened; he cries and says—"Have pity on me, my Lord, come to me with a form which may be conducive to my realisation of bliss." The cosmic form of the Lord then disappears in a body of light. Yet

the devotee is not satisfied, he entreats—"Come my Lord, come before me in such a form as may induce me to love you." Ultimately, the Lord yields to the entreaties of the devotee and assumes the most beautiful and lovable human form. And then the Lord makes the significant proclamation, "I was formless—and as formless I was all alone—forsaken by all. I created you—and you went on weeping and weeping for me,—and by that you have awakened me to my self-consciousness. By ceaseless weeping and weeping you have attracted me—and you have thus created me exactly in your image." The attempt of man to establish the most intimate relationship with God raises God from His slumber of self-oblivion—His formless nothingness—and makes it possible even for God to realise His own self in and through the infinite possibility of beauty, love and bliss. As man realises the meaning of his whole being with reference to his relation with God, the embodiment of all beauty, love and bliss, so also God by the same process realises His own beauty, love and bliss, in and through His relationship with man—the finite being. This Vaiṣṇava spirit of Sisir Kumar has very nicely been expressed in the following utterance of his—"God, Oh my Lord, appear before me just like a man, so that I may speak a word or two to you and thereby be congenially and completely satisfied." Again it has been said,—"I shall enjoy you through my

five senses, then and then only shall I say—you are really kind to me."

The Vaiṣṇavas, particularly of Bengal, are prone to think of God, even as a personal Being, eternally in union with His consort—the female counterpart. The Bengal Vaiṣṇavas would always think of God as Kṛṣṇa—eternally absorbed in His love-dalliances with His beloved counterpart, Rādhā. How could we get at this idea of the *Yugala* (Pair)? The author would apply the same human analogy as before—or rather he would draw conclusions from his experiences as a man. As for this idea of the eternal and original pair the author says,—"I have seen it in this world—all the creatures live in pairs; there is the *Puruṣa* (male) and the *Prakṛti* (female) among all the beings,—this shows that these two aspects (*Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*) must be two principles in God Himself. If there be any supreme One adorable to all, He must be of the nature of man; all the pairs in man are but shadow of the supreme One; if there be the manifestation of the *Puruṣa* and the *Prakṛti* in the shadow below, it has to be surmised that the truth above (of which we are all shadows) must have in Him this principle of duality." It has been said in the Upaniṣads, the One non-dual ultimate truth divides itself, as it were, as the male and the female for the sake of self-enjoyment—for it could not enjoy itself without having a second to it. In Bengal Vaiṣṇavism God is con-

ceived of as having eternally divided Himself through His own power (*Yogamāyā*) into two halves—the enjoyer and the enjoyed—Kṛṣṇa, the enjoyer and Rādhā, the enjoyed. This idea of the divine pair, according to Sisir Kumar, was originally suggested by a conscious or unconscious empirical generalisation from a close observation of the ways of man as also of all the other beings of the world.

Kṛṣṇa enjoys His sports in the company of Rādhā in the *Aprākṛta Vṛndāvana* or the supra-mundane land of effulgence and pure bliss. In describing this Vṛndāvana Sisir Kumar does not exactly follow the theological interpretation and description of the older Vaiṣṇavas. Vṛndāvana, according to the author, is an ideal land built of the best that man possesses in his life on earth. There is beauty and sweetness in the world, but they are always mixed up with the gross mass; everything that is beautiful and sweet on earth has been gathered and as it were shorn off the mass—and then Vṛndāvana has been constituted with all the beauty and sweetness thus purified and extracted. Vṛndāvana is not therefore the denial or negation of our life on earth—it may better be conceived as the fulfilment of our life on earth.

Even in the conception of Rādhā Sisir Kumar introduces a happy novelty of idea. Rādhā has been conceived even by the older Vaiṣṇavas as

having something like a double existence, the original one residing eternally in the supranatural Vṛndāvana, and a replica of it manifesting itself in the corporeal form as the cowherdess of the geographical Vṛndāvana. Who is really this Rādhā in the corporeal form? She is not an ideal only of womanhood, she is really the ideal for all beings of the world—a limit to which the beings can transform themselves in divine beauty and love As passionate lovers of the supreme One every being may be conceived as a maiden. The majority of these maidens have been deceived, as it were, by that cunning One through allurements of mundane gains; but a few there are who could not be thus allured,—they have sacrificed everything for the sake of love—their love for the Supreme. But all who renounce the world cannot attain to God, for as our poet says, "all the maidens are not beautiful and sweet enough to capture the mind of that extremely fickle-minded One!" The poet introduces a scene where these love-lorn maidens (who represent great devotees) are described as exchanging views among themselves. One maiden says,—"That black One (*Kāliyā*) is extremely fickle—He can be captured and controlled by none, and the dear One in the prime of His youth is doing violence to everybody, but the more that fickle one harasses us, the more weeps our heart for Him. Sound and sober were we all—and He has made us mad,—we have made

a gift to Him of everything we possess—Yet He plays tricks with us. In spite of everything our hearts long for Him—we must have this Black One bound down by a really beautiful woman.' The other maiden in tears says,—"He is the best in the three worlds, through what can you expect to capture His mind? I offered this body of mine, but He has not been captured, for defiled is this body of mine—and perfectly pure and transparent is He. Could we get hold of a perfectly beautiful maiden, she would have been a decent match for Him. We require a maiden who is perfectly pure and yet cleverly attractive, who is an embodiment of love itself, who is coy and simple and yet can attract the whole world. We will make a gift of a jewel of this type to our Black One so that the tears of His eyes may cease. We must make an effort to have among us a maiden of this type—then and then only shall we be able to bind down the saviour residing in Goloka (the abode of the Lord)." Then follows an invocation for the presence on earth of an ideal maiden of this type. Who can make her presence possible on earth? Only goddess *Kātyāyanī*—the *Sakti*—the almighty power of the Lord can do it. That almighty power must be active in infinite grace for the created beings before there may be the possibility of a most perfect maiden—a Rādhā—among men. When there is the advent of such a maiden among men God is bound to leave His abode situated high

above—and to condescend to incarnate himself on earth as the most perfect Beloved. That is the main secret of the incarnation of God. The religious efforts of man must be aimed at an approximation to this ideal of Rādhāhood. If a devotee really feels himself to be a true maiden-lover of God, he can never do anything wrong; for to do anything wrong is to defile oneself—to make oneself ugly and unacceptable to God. Even the path of austerity is not the path for a real devotee, for as the author puts it eloquently,—"If I shave this long tuft of hair, and wear a small piece of cloth in my loins and assume a miserable appearance—my darling the Black One will make Him beside Himself with weeping—I know him very well." The devotee must make himself the most beautiful and sweetest in body and mind—and all that not for his own sake—but for the sake of God. The same idea has very nicely been expressed in another context also. The devotee is depicted here as a wife suffering from the pang of separation from her husband (God) who has long left her and has been staying away in a far off country. The wife (through all her religious efforts) sends a letter to the husband requesting him, with all her humility of spirit and faithful submission, to come back at the earliest possible moment. But the husband replies from the far off land—"It is not possible for me to come to you just now—but failing to come I am sending the

few lines that follow as advice to you. If you want ornaments I shall surely send them for you, and if you want me, I shall come soon, I shall be to you just as you would be to me, you will have me just as you desire to have me. When you become truly eager to see me, you shall surely see me. It is a story of the long past that I had acquaintance and intimacy with you, and again I feel a strong urge within to meet you. What more should I write and what would you understand? You will know me gradually." The wife receives the letter, reads between the lines over and over again and at last catches at the hidden meaning. She keeps it saying to herself,—"He says, he will be to me as I shall be (*i.e.* as I shall prepare myself to be); but alas! dirty am I, and if I call him he will come with rubbish on his body; a worthless woman I am, if I ask him to come—he will come to me as a worthless man. So I must not at this stage want him to come near to me.—Let me first of all prepare myself fully, let me make him perfectly beautiful by first making myself so. Sweet will he be if I grow sweet and I shall meet the most beautiful one only after I have transformed myself into a beautiful damsel."

Sisir Kumar holds the view that one need not resort to much reading to have a glimpse of the true nature of God or to be in love with Him; if one moves about with one's eyes open to the workings of nature and the behaviour of the

beings all around, one is sure to be eye to eye with the truth. One has to be convinced of the fact that God cannot be anything but kind if one closely observes the relation between a mother and her child. He arranges for milk in the breasts of the mother before the child is born, and He bestows infinite filial attraction on the mother only to ensure the safety and growth of the child. It has further to be marked that, lest any mother refuses to feed her baby with her breasts, He has made the biological device that a mother feels a blissful sensation in feeding her baby; and it is owing to this device that even a cow bellows and runs after its calf. Again if we mark the taste and workmanship revealed through a single flower of the forest we cannot but be convinced that God must be a perfect embodiment of beauty. But alas,—man is much too busy with his multifarious business all around and he has not the time even to glance at it. As the poet piquantly says,—"A flower of the forest it was, and matchless was it in beauty,—it was placed within the grass; many people pass by and do not even glance at it.—O, they are very much busy with their works of the worldly life." But the question may also be pertinently put, why should God place that beautiful flower almost hidden within wild grasses in the wayside of the forest? Why should it not be easily accessible and appreciable to men at large so that man may

very easily be convinced of the glory of God? The answer of the poet on behalf of the Creator will be, "I enhance its glory by thus hiding it". Had beauty and truth been so easily understandable to man, man would never have felt so violently attracted towards them and impelled to dive deep into the mystery of the world in quest of the most precious thing in life and world. It is no use making truth cheap, for it loses its value and attraction by being so. It is again a wrong attitude to try to know the whole truth all at once; truth is something which is to be realised through every step and stage of life; one doubt leads to a conviction, which in its turn raises new queries which are to be solved in the light of new experiences; and in this way the whole life should be taken as a continual process of realising the truth. There is a process of evolution even in the spiritual life, there is a continual process of gradual unfolding and we must have patience and perseverance to reach the highest stage.

But what about the problem of evil and the boundless sorrow that man experiences in his life? If God, the creator of the universe, be all good and merciful, why should there be evil at all and why should His most beloved beings suffer from sorrow almost continually? As for the problem of evil the author advances the same answer as most of the philosophers and theolo-

gians do, viz., that God expresses and enjoys Himself continually through contradictions; self-expression and self-realisation of God becomes impossible unless there are the contrary and contradictory possibilities. But as for the evil and the consequent sorrow of the individual life the author has to offer an interpretation of his own. He says that nothing of this world is good or evil in its independent character, good and evil are consequent on the circumstances under which a thing is taken or viewed. The author offers a series of examples in this context. He says that lime burns our mouth---but not when it is taken in a proper quantity with the betel-nut and the leaf. A large quantity of salt disagrees violently with our tongue, but not so when taken with cooked food in the appropriate quantity. Scent is pleasant only when applied to the nose—and it irritates when applied to the eyes. One feels comfortable when warming one's body before the heat of the fire—but a little more will burn one badly. The fundamental question is then a question of propriety, harmony and balance and these have to be managed by man with the help of his free will. It is the freedom of will that leaves scope for all good and evil. It may be asked, if evil proceeds from the freedom of human will, why is not man thoroughly determined by the will of God in order to save him from the possibility of evil and consequent sufferings? The answer is, had

man been thoroughly determined, or in other words put within a cage, man would not have infinite development in the sphere of life, mind and spirit. Encagement might have saved him from evil, but that would have at the same time robbed him of all his future possibilities, the grandeur of humanity itself. He suffers infinitely for his freedom, yet ultimately he gains through his life's struggle. The struggle strengthens him and purifies him and evolves an ever-expanding being from within—a being that approximates to divinity in beauty, sweetness and love.